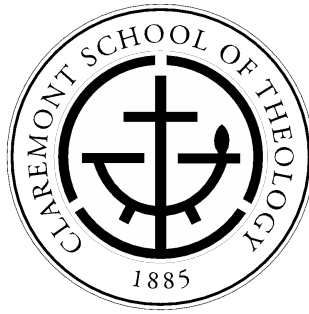


LEAVING HOME: PILGRIMAGE INTO THE POSSIBILITIES OF LIMINALITY
A CONGREGATION'S JOURNEY AWAY FROM IDENTITY WITH A BUILDING

A Professional Project
presented to
the Faculty of
Claremont School of Theology

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
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May 2019



This professional project completed by

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has been presented to and accepted by the
faculty of Claremont School of Theology in
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May 2019

ABSTRACT

Claremont School of Theology
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Leaving Home: Pilgrimage into the Possibilities of Liminality

A Congregation's Journey away from Identity with a Building

Many congregations within Christian mainline denominations are stuck in a space marked by nostalgia for the past, declining membership rolls, and historic and magnificent edifices they are unable to maintain.

This paper offers Pilgrimage, Wandering, and Sojourn as spiritual practices that can move the congregation physically so as to foster internal, spiritual movement and provide a means of releasing some of the hold our buildings place on us. It will include a case study of a six-part liminal journey rooted in these ancient practices taken by one congregation to escape the trap of identity with their building and what once happened there.

The first chapter will describe ways that many churches have become mired in place. Chapter two will explore elements of biblical practices of Pilgrimage, Wandering, and Sojourning used as spiritual tools to free congregations from limited perspectives with fixed and stagnant identities. The third chapter will describe the actual project undertaken by one congregation. Chapter four will provide reflections upon the project and recommendations for other congregations wishing to engage in a similar process.

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to the following congregations, in grateful appreciation for their willingness to walk alongside me and to hold me with loving grace as we cared for one another:

Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, Arcadia, Ohio

Church of the Valley, Van Nuys, California

McCarty Memorial Christian Church, Los Angeles, California

First Christian Church, Whittier, California

and

to MSQ, for her loving support and her willingness to be my person.

Acknowledgments

I wish to gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Gerhard Schaefer and Rev. Dr. John Phalen for proofreading my manuscript and literally helping me mind my p's and q's.

I also gratefully acknowledge the support and guidance of Professor Lincoln E. Galloway whose edits and comments got this project across the finish line.

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Introduction

The State of the Church: We Have a Problem

“But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward.”¹

“I’ve come to see that what matters most is not our *status* but our *trajectory*, not where we are but where we’re going, not where we stand but where we’re headed. Christian faith for me is no longer a static location but a great spiritual journey. And that changes everything ... Unfortunately, religion often becomes more of a cage than a guide, holding us back rather than summoning us onward”²

Many congregations within mainline denominations are stuck in a space marked by nostalgia for the past, declining membership rolls, and historic, impressive and magnificent edifices that they cannot maintain. It seems that, in particular, American Protestant mainline congregations who experienced the post-war and baby-boom surge in membership are having a hard time moving ahead without dragging along the structure and programs that emerged during that busy and growing era. This state of affairs has led to this rather sardonic declaration among church leaders: The good news is that if 1955 ever comes around again, we have the church ready for it.

Despite taking part in studies, programs, and self-reflection; many congregations can’t seem to make a bold commitment to doing something really *new*, and have spent several decades now rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic, re-creating past forms of ministry under new names or with renewed vigor and zeal. Satirical cartoonist Dennis Fletcher sums up the state of these churches in this way: A group of lay-leaders are gathered around a conference table. A man

¹ Jeremiah 7:24 (RSV).

² Brian D. McLaren, *The Great Spiritual Migration: How The World’s Largest Religion Is Seeking A Better Way To Be Christian* (New York: Convergent Books, 2016), xi.

in the center (the committee chair) speaks to the group: “The goal of this committee is to research, discover, and implement new and dynamic programs that will recreate our past.”³

This cartoon speaks to a disconnect that many congregations and church leaders experience. They know (intellectually) that they cannot simply repeat their past (without continuing to dwindle in numbers and influence in the world) and yet they also know (emotionally, deep in their hearts) that things *worked* back in the 40s, 50s and 60s in a way that they never worked before or since. Even though they might make individual and group decisions to enact change, when that change looms or actually occurs something rises up within them that elicits the response, “Oh no, we can’t change *that*.” It seems *that* has somehow become an integral part of who we are, and must be dragged along into the future with us.

Suddenly Overbuilding-ed; A local congregation in context

“Jesus said to him, ‘No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.’”⁴

“The moment a building like a cathedral becomes *fixed* rather than something fluid and continually changing it is a museum rather than a living symbol of the city.”⁵

First Christian Church of Whittier, California (FCCW) traces its founding back to formative worship gatherings of twenty-three individuals in as-yet unfinished classrooms of the Jonathon Bailey School in 1895. After several years legally incorporating and moving to rooms above a local business for another few years, the congregation built a 300-seat sanctuary on three city lots in 1900. After building three additions to that structure and filling the available space, the current landmark sanctuary was erected a few blocks away in 1923 and subsequently added education buildings in 1952 and 1963 which now fill a block in Uptown Whittier. A church

³ Dennis Fletcher, *Fletch*, Baptist Press Comics, accessed November 27, 2018, www.bpnews.net/comics. Keyword: committee.

⁴ Luke 9:62 (RSV).

⁵ Phillip Sheldrake, *Spaces For The Sacred: Place, Memory, and Identity* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 154.

history compiled as part of a 100-year celebration says that the Whittier Daily News described the 1923 building and its large 1,000-seat (including overflow) sanctuary as “beautiful in conception and complete in execution.”⁶ During the Great Depression congregants took out second mortgages on their own homes and sold chicken dinners (for thirty-five cents) to pay for the note on the building.

The congregation’s 1970 seventy-fifth anniversary publication lists attendance in 1924 as about 650, soon dropping to almost 400 and rising to 750 in the early 30s only to drop back to 500 in 1935. At the end of WWII membership neared 700, and in the Southern California population boom of the late 40s and early 50s, weekly attendance to all programs and services neared 2,000. The 1923 building “suddenly was obsolete”⁷ and the adjacent youth building was built on additional adjacent city lots in 1952, and similarly the two-story Education building with seven elementary classrooms was completed in 1962. Very soon after, attendance began to drop in the 60s and by 1970 active membership totaled 1,200 across all ages. The church 1989 directory listed 520 total children and adults and the 2006 edition listed 193 total. In 2018 total active membership was 72 with an average worship attendance of 40.

Notes from the property committee show that the second-floor classrooms built in 1963 were mothballed in the early 70s, relegated to closet status until reclaimed by the Free Store (like a boutique or thrift shop, but the items are free—it accepts donations of used items in good condition and offers those items to the general public at no cost) in 2015. The lower-level classrooms were leased to a pre-school in the mid-80s and have served that purpose since that time. The 1952-era youth building likewise began to be surrendered to non-church tenants as the

⁶ Don Keiser, researcher, *75 Years* (Anniversary Booklet created by members of First Christian Church Whittier, 1970), 6.

⁷ Keiser, *75 Years*, 7.

congregation slowly retreated back into the main 1923 structure. Community-wide programs such as the Women's and Children's Crisis Center, the Inter-Community Counseling Center, and the Whittier Area Literacy Council all trace their roots to this building, and the Literacy Council remains as a subsidized tenant today.

For all of the new uses that the two newer education buildings have been dedicated to, it is the 1923 building that has seen the least dramatic changes over the decades, with the sanctuary last having been remodeled in the 1970s. FCCW still gathers at 10:45 each Sunday morning for a pipe organ, hymnal, and choir-centered worship service with congregants seated in the nearly century-old pews. The pipe organ is still well maintained and still fills the building with powerful swells of sound, but the choir (once actually two adult choirs, a youth choir and a children's choir totaling over eighty singers) is now just six voices affectionately known as "the little choir that could."

Leadership within the ever-shrinking congregation feels increasingly pressured to wear many hats. Roughly sixteen dedicated servant leaders struggle to maintain organizational structures designed to manage a corporate-sized church with family-sized resources, meaning that many leaders are burning their physical, emotional, and spiritual candles at both ends. They feel a sense of failure and guilt that they can no longer do the same volume of work that preceding generations were able to accomplish. Much time is spent deliberating how to best allocate precious remaining resources, with much being demanded to keep the aging buildings safe and functional.

Like FCCW, many congregations, when asked who they *are*, will very often respond by narrating who they *used to be*. Much of that story will revolve around the building(s) that have housed the glory days of the church: We are the church that meets in the impressive building at

the prominent corner with the massive pillars, beautiful stained glass windows, ornate wooden pews, and the big and beautiful pipe organ. At one point we had 2,000 members and our forty-voice choir was the best in the city. All of the important people worshipped here, and we had Sunday school classes meeting in three buildings.

As in so much else of our lives, we look back at our church past with rose-colored-glasses. In our mind's eye we don't remember pockets of empty pews even during the good old days and we don't remember closing old classrooms as we opened new ones; as we tell it the place was *full*.

In addition to the desire to recreate the success of the good old days, (numbers and programs), congregants are also trapped in the past because of the memories of loved ones and other former members who once ran those programs and who sat in the pews with them. To remodel a Sunday school classroom for another use is somehow to discredit and give up on the vision that was brought to life by some former church leader, pastor, or teacher. For the oldest members, to turn over the Deskins Room to another church community as a worship space is hard enough because the Deskins Sunday School Class had met there for over sixty years. Adding to this repurposing of the room, the removal of class rosters, photos, plaques, and other artifacts of this once-highly-vital 100-plus member class seems like abandonment of scores of friends who once sat with them in this room. To remove the pictures of class members and of former teachers and pastors is to somehow admit that they may one day be forgotten. It is to admit that current members themselves are the last vestiges of a chapter that is closing. As long as the pictures, plaques, and other mementos remain, they and their generation will be remembered, even if only by virtue of the shrine that the classroom has become.

This paper offers Pilgrimage, Wandering, and Sojourn as spiritual practices that, by design, move the congregation physically in such a way as to foster internal, spiritual movement, and is designed to provide a means of releasing at least some of the hold our buildings place on us. It will include a case study of a six-part liminal journey rooted in these ancient practices taken by one congregation, First Christian Church of Whittier, California (FCCW) to escape the hold of identity with their building and what once happened there.

The first chapter, “How Did We Get Here?,” will describe some of the ways that many churches have become mired in place.

The second chapter, “Journey Away from Self and Toward God,” will explore the way that the biblical practices of Pilgrimage, Wandering, and Sojourning can be used as spiritual tools to help to free ourselves from limited perspectives, and a fixed and stagnant identity.

The third chapter, “Let’s Take a Hike,” will describe the actual project undertaken by one congregation, First Christian Church of Whittier, California.

The fourth chapter, “The View From the Other Side: Reflections on the Journey,” will provide reflections upon the project, as well as recommendations and suggestions for others wishing to engage in a similar ministry.

Chapter One

How Did We Get *Here*?

“Pride goes before destruction,
and a haughty spirit before a fall.”⁸

“As Jesus puts it, one ‘self’ must die for another ‘Self’ to be born.”⁹

Over the recent decades, mainline churches have engaged in much mourning and wringing of hands over the numerical decline of church attendance, church resources, and church influence in the world. It may be of some comfort to note that the church has been through times of major change in the past. As religion author and lecturer Phyllis Tickle maintains in her book, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why*, four 500-year epochs of what we call Church have come and gone before our time, and each time the change was hard.¹⁰

In the beginning of its initial 500-year period, the church was primarily an underground or counter-cultural movement. It was small and intimate, local and largely a loosely and informally affiliated network of home-churches without the overhead of paid administrators and large buildings specifically designated for Sabbath gatherings. In 380 CE it saw the benefits (or the pitfalls, depending on your ecclesiological stance) of the support and mandate of the State.

The next 500 years coincided with the early Middle/Dark Age as Rome deteriorated and fell. During this chapter of church history, monasteries kept the faith alive everywhere except for the very largest city-centers where wealthy patrons supported more grand and lavish worship centers.

⁸ Proverbs 16:18 (RSV).

⁹ Richard Rohr, *Eager to Love: The Alternative Way of Francis of Assisi* (Cincinnati: Franciscan Media, 2014), 69.

¹⁰ Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 26–27.

The great Schism of 1054 between the Eastern and Western Churches began the third 500-year cycle, and the church reorganized itself around two city centers in Rome and Constantinople. The fourth 500-year cycle began with the Protestant Reformation sparked by Luther's posting of his 95 Theses in 1517. This latter period was marked by the explosion of denominationalism, and eventually in the United States grew into the church-centered culture many of us lived through as late as the 1960s.

It is the very success of Christianity to influence the broader culture, and of local congregations to influence and dominate within smaller communities, that has made it so hard for many congregations to move on forward into the next 500-year cycle. For so many of us, we were *there* in the 1950s (or more precisely the decade between 1955 and 1965), when communities could note with pride that there was seemingly a church on every street corner; and that nothing else was open on a Sunday morning, (a situation aided by legislation, colloquially referred to as blue laws); and nothing else was scheduled on Thursday night (or whatever Church Night had been designated locally) when, among other things, Bible study, confirmation classes, choir rehearsals, Christmas pageant rehearsals were *the* things that happened even before school homework. In most communities, Christian prayer began every school day. Church was happening in record numbers of places and in record numbers of expressions.¹¹ And we were *proud* of it!

In contrast, half a century later, churches are *closing* in the United States in record numbers. On average, there are 4,000 closings each year compared to 1,000 new church starts.¹²

¹¹ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon & Shuster Paperbacks, 2000), 65.

¹² Richard J. Krejcir, "Statistics and Reasons for Church Decline," Church Leadership.org, accessed August 13, 2018, <http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=42346>.

We have passed through a period of historic church attendance and are now trying to recalibrate how it is that we will continue to be church in a period of dwindling participation in formal religion. We could once count on the beauty and size of our sanctuaries to serve as the main attraction for newcomers, but a by-product of the record-attendance of the 50s and early 60s are church campuses that are now over-building-ed and under-peopled. To meet the demands of numbers and the programs of their day, a great many congregations built ever-larger worship facilities and additional classroom buildings adjacent to them. The plan for long-term support and maintenance of these expanding campuses was *continued* growth. Instead, the church has entered into a period of decline.

Begun in England in the late eighteenth century, the Sunday School movement spread across the globe, firmly taking root in the United States. By the late nineteenth century the American Sunday School Union reported that about 15% of the U.S. population were attending Sunday Schools.¹³

Church communities responded with expanded facilities to accommodate the swelling numbers in their Sunday School rolls. Congregations built separate education structures modeled after school buildings next to their existing houses of worship. In addition to classrooms, churches provided activity rooms where these classes could come together for larger gatherings. By the turn of the twentieth century, congregations began designating separate classroom space for distinct age groups, often for each specific grade.¹⁴ During the membership boom of the 50s and 60s, if a congregation had membership rolls that were large enough, multiple classrooms for any given grade might be required. It was not uncommon, then, for a church community to

¹³ Gerald E. Knoff, *The World Sunday School Movement: The Story of a Broadening Mission* (New York, Seabury Press, 1979), 3.

¹⁴ Knoff, *World Sunday School Movement*, 40.

maintain at least half a dozen distinct classroom settings and often many more. Nursery, toddlers, pre-K, kindergarten, individual grades 1–6, junior high, high school, young adults, young married, adults, and older adults might each expect a classroom space dedicated (often exclusively) to their use on Sunday mornings. In addition to classrooms, fellowship and recreation facilities for distinct age groups, often in additional separate buildings, were added as necessities of ministry.

What no one could foresee in 1963 was just how short-lived this boom in attendance would be. As we look back now, being honest with ourselves, we can see that it wasn't really that we in church were doing anything all that amazing; churches and many other groups in America benefited from a short-lived nation-wide swell in civic and social engagement following World War II, and a concurrent Baby Boom. In his book, *Bowling Alone*, Harvard Professor of Public Policy David Putnam gives a thorough examination and analysis of the sharp decline across the wide scope of social groups after a previous sharp rise, (a 15–20 percent rise from the 50s to the 60s and an equal decline by the 70s).¹⁵ Evidently our churches were simply riding a larger rising tide. “In the 1960s, in fact, community groups across America had seemed to stand on the threshold of a new era of expanded involvement ... Each annual report registered rising membership. Churches and synagogues were packed, as more Americans worshipped together than only a few decades earlier, perhaps more than ever in American history.”¹⁶ Putnam observes, “Somehow in the last several decades of the twentieth century all these community groups and tens of thousands like them across America began to fade.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 70.

¹⁶ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 16.

¹⁷ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 16.

But from our perspective inside the church, looking back with rose-colored glasses, this boom in congregational growth had been due to successful evangelizing and the quality of the worship and Christian education being provided. People were coming in record numbers, we assumed then and still arrogantly maintain now, because of the quality of the programming and facilities we offered. The preaching was more successful because the preaching was *better*, the music program was more successful because the musicians were better, the education department was more successful because the education provided was better, and the community service/outreach ministries were more successful because they were better. People flocked to *our* sanctuary because it was better somehow. These were the years when everything was running optimally, it seemed—and as we look back on them we hold to the mantra, “We must have been doing it right back then; look at the way we were *growing*.”

Unfortunately, this unprecedented success became something of a trap for many churches because the undeniable numerical attraction and attendant success of the programs made it appear that this was *the* way to do church. As church attendance numbers began to decrease in the late 60s and early 70s many church leaders responded by trying to do what they had done in the 50s, but *better*. A high-water mark had been set in the 50s, it seems, and that mark designated more than peak attendance. That mark was also a record for us of when the church was doing it *right*. If numbers were declining, it simply meant that we had to work harder at what we had already implemented.

We couldn’t imagine that people were no longer as interested in what we were offering; we obviously just weren’t doing it as well as we had been before. In a very real way, many churches of the late 70s and the decades that followed became backward-looking as they focused on recapturing what had been lightening-in-a-bottle record attendance in the generation before.

Church membership *growth* became the illusive goal that many congregations chased and are still chasing. We worried that in comparison to the generation(s) before us, we were somehow failing to do what they had done so well—fill the church. Rather than acknowledging changing societal dynamics in general, churches saw this declining participation as a rejection or disinterest in what their church was offering specifically; it was said, “We’re just not *reaching them* like we used to.”

But We’re Special

“Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet,
for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”¹⁸

“The temple serves as a focusing lens, establishing the possibility of significance by directing attention, by requiring the perception of difference. Within the temple, the ordinary (which to any outside eye or ear remains wholly ordinary) becomes significant, ‘sacred,’ simply by being there.”¹⁹

Around the world and across traditions, there are certain places that are regarded as holy. These special places are approached with respect and veneration as if to say that God is present *here*, and not so much over *there*. God experiences are possible in this place; whatever you are doing over there is not only not God-filled, it is likely *un-Godly*. This binary sacred/profane, religious/secular, and even clean/dirty worldview remains firmly a part of the traditions and teachings that we have been handed that we look to for what constitutes church as opposed to world. We have told ourselves and the outside world that houses of worship (particularly Christian houses of worship) are *the* places to learn about and experience the one, true God. We have claimed a monopoly on real and true experiences of the divine. We have told those out there that they had better come in here if they want to really know God.

¹⁸ Exodus 3:5 (RSV).

¹⁹ Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), 104.

Many out there in the world are not only declining our outreach and invitation to come *in* and join us in our buildings full of stale rituals; they are, in effect, reaching back to us and inviting us *out* of our churches to experience God in fresh new ways.

Eddie Gibbs, Professor Emeritus of Church Growth, and Ryan K. Bolger, Associate Professor of Church in Contemporary Culture, both at Fuller Seminary, present a collection of critiques of the modern church with inputs from fifty leaders of emerging churches. Among the criticisms directed at the contemporary church is the sacred/secular duality that casts our church buildings as places where God is available as opposed to the rest of the world. Gibbs and Bolger claim that “sacralization in emerging churches is about one thing: the deconstruction of the sacred/secular split of modernity.”²⁰ They continue, “For emerging churches, there are no longer any bad places, bad people, or bad times ... All modern dualisms can be overcome.”²¹

In *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam concludes his chapter on religious participation in America with this sobering observation: “In short, as the twenty-first century opens, Americans are going to church less often than we did three or four decades ago, *and the churches we go to are less engaged in the wider community*. Trends in religious life reinforce rather than counterbalance the ominous plunge in social connectedness in the secular community.”²² As we sit rooted within our buildings and scheme at ways to get *them* to come in *here* to join us in what we myopically maintain we’ve *always* done, we are failing to engage and to encourage broader engagement with neighbor and God in the streets outside our walls.

Fewer people are going to church, and of those who are still going, fewer are interested in the form of church that many of us are still desperately maintaining. We sit and wait in campuses

²⁰ Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 66.

²¹ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 67.

²² Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 79. Emphasis mine.

that were built to educate the masses, rather than to embrace the few. We sit and wait for them to come, rather than going out to meet and be met. We are stuck at “Come meet God here!” while many outside our walls are seeking to find God everywhere.

There is a power within the story we tell about ourselves. In his work *Spaces For The Sacred: Place, Memory, and Identity*, religious historian and spirituality scholar Philip Sheldrake says that “there can be no sense of place without narrative”²³ and for the narrative that many congregations tell about who we are, so often rooted in the past, this means that our sense of the place where we live (our sanctuary home) must also remain rooted in the past. Sheldrake also maintains “our identity is formed by the story that we tell about ourselves.”²⁴ This leaves us in a loop, of sorts. We don’t want to make changes to the ways we use the building because our identity is tied to the story we tell about ourselves about all the things that used to happen there. We sit in the midst of a place that resists the telling of a new story about ourselves.

If we are to escape the bounded-ness of the way we’ve always done things, we must first be able to tell a different story about who we are. Franciscan friar and writer on spirituality Richard Rohr, in *Eager to Love: The Alternative Way of Francis of Assisi*, maintains that we cannot simply be renamed by someone else if we are to be truly transformed, but “the foundational meaning of transformation is to surrender to this new identity and to consciously draw upon it. In short, we must change our very self-image rather than just be told some new things to see or do.”²⁵

Unfortunately, for many American mainline churches in the twenty-first century, who we are is verbalized in terms of where we are physically located and what we used to do there. As

²³ Sheldrake, *Spaces For The Sacred*, 17.

²⁴ Sheldrake, *Spaces For The Sacred*, 20.

²⁵ Rohr, *Eager to Love*, 68.

long as that story is predominately the story of who we were and the context that existed for us back then, it will be next to impossible for us to move ahead in any significant way. We will always be, in some way, a failed or faded version of who we used to be; we will be caretakers of a legacy. Our houses of worship and the campuses that have grown up around them will have become museums whose primary function is to preserve the artifacts of those bygone days and to allow us to re-create in smaller and smaller ways the rituals that were at the center of that period.

Changing this self-descriptive narrative is no easy task. As Brian McLaren writes in *The Great Spiritual Migration: How The World's Largest Religion Is Seeking A Better Way To Be Christian*, "It's difficult to cancel your nostalgic vacation into the past or awaken from your fanciful speculations about the future so you can engage passionately with the fierce urgency of now. It's difficult to retool our churches from service providers, museums of religious lore, or climate-controlled spiritual warehouses or country clubs into schools or studios of love."²⁶

In our mind's eye, we are still somehow who we once were, because to live in the reverie of the past is to deny the harsh reality of the present. In my introduction I described the struggle to repurpose a room known as the Deskins Room. Named for a beloved pastor from the bustling heyday of the 50s and 60s, this small example of the invested memories in one room is played out again and again throughout the landmark building, as individuals and small groups are associated with the many different rooms. To repurpose the Bride's Room is not only to admit that there are not enough weddings anymore to warrant a room solely dedicated to brides, used at most ten days per year, it is to risk forgetting about the senior-saint who for decades served as the wedding consultant.

²⁶ McLaren, *The Great Spiritual Migration*, 184.

As long as the bride's room remains intact and is called the bride's room, it allows the possibility of imagining a time when we once again will host many weddings every month, and we keep a sainted memory alive in a way. If the nursery remains in the same room in which it has always been, it is easier for us to keep alive the memories of the dear saints that served there and the decades when the cradle rolls were full. If the bride's room remains the bride's room, if the nursery remains the nursery, if the young couple's room remains the young couple's room – we will be prepared to pick up right where we left off *once we grow again*. If 1955 comes around again, we will have the church ready for it. And, in a way, we will still have all of our old friends and leaders with us to help out—in our mind's eye.

Unfortunately visitors and new members do not see these rooms in the same way as the oldest senior saints—visitors see rooms faded and frayed by decades of wear and dated by changing fashion and practices. Without a connection to the faces in the photos, these rooms can really be experienced as shrines dedicated to the past, rather than as rooms prepared and available for the present, let alone the future. In keeping the memories of the past alive via fading paint, furnishings and dedication plaques; congregations unwittingly prevent (or make it *very* difficult for) new visions and dreams to take root in these rooms.

United Methodist Pastor James A. Harnish served local congregations for forty-three years before his retirement from congregational ministry. With that long record of leadership, he has discovered that congregations must be willing to die in order to live. In his book, *You Only Have To Die: Leading Your Congregation to New Life*, Harnish writes, “The sad reality is that many congregations are so afraid of dying that dying is about the only thing they can do. Worse yet, they are so terminally infected with petty, small-time ailments when they could be raised to

new life if they were willing to face the risk of death for things that really matter: what they believe, who they are, and the mission that God is calling them to fulfill.”²⁷

At FCCW, like so many places, our buildings and our identities that are tied to them enable us to feel special and important. The bigger and more ornate the building and the more prominent its location, the better we feel about ourselves as the inhabitants or curators of it.²⁸ We have fallen prey to the trap of pride. Or choir loft could still seat forty singers. We were *somebody* once; we were important back then. Our building is imposing and it sits on an important and historically significant corner. City leaders have always attended here. In order to imagine becoming something else in a new age, we would have to also imagine letting go of that precious former identity.

To all of us, Harnish speaks this hard truth: “The truth about some of us most of the time and most of us some of the time is that we’re not all that wild about change, particularly when change involves something with which we are familiar, something comfortable, something we have known, respected, trusted, or loved over time.”²⁹

As Richard Rohr puts it: “Yearning for a new way will not produce it. Only ending the old way can do that. You cannot hold onto the old, all the while declaring that you want something new. The old will defy the new; The old will deny the new; The old will decry the new. There is only one way to bring in the new. You must make room for it.”³⁰

²⁷ James A. Harnish, *You Only Have To Die: Leading Your Congregation to New Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 12.

²⁸ Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 11.

²⁹ Harnish, *You Only Have To Die*, 127.

³⁰ Rohr, *Eager to Love*, xiii.

In his book *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming The Faith*,

Brian McLaren speaks on behalf of a church that *wants* to change:

We choose to seek a better path into the future than the one we have been on. We do not sense in the gospel of Jesus a once-upon-a-time newness. We do not experience the gospel as new only in contrast to something called the “Old Testament”, leaving the gospel over time to grow arthritic, hardened, stiff, and crotchety ... We do not conceive of our faith primarily as a promise to our ancestors, a vow to dutifully carry on something that was theirs and we have inherited. No, it is more like God’s promise uttered to us from the future, toward which we reach an outstretched and hopeful hand—just as our ancestors did. The gospel is for us a beckoning, a summons, always associated with transitive words like “leave”, “come”, “go”, and “follow.”³¹

How do some congregations escape the trap of becoming stuck in the past?

According to Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation, (a leadership training and assessment ministry arm of the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ), for a congregation to have endured for a long time and to have remained vital, their congregational life will have gone through several forty-year cycles.³²

Congregations change as they mature, and a church continues to change as it declines.

Churches attract different people at different stages and lose different people at different stages.

³¹ Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming The Faith* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2010), 28.

³² Hope Partnership for Transformational Change: New Beginnings Assessment; House Meeting Leaders Guide, 2013.

“The longer a church waits, the more difficult it is to change.”³³

<u>Administration</u> : Attracts Managers	I	<u>Energy Loss</u> : Creatives Leave
	I	<i>(Loss of Creativity)</i>
<u>Program</u> : Attracts Initiators	I	<u>Intimacy Loss</u> : Relationals Leave
	I	
2nd Quadrant	I	3rd Quadrant
	I	
<u>Intimacy</u> : Attracts Relationals	I	<u>Program Loss</u> : Initiators Leave
	I	<i>(Loss of Flexibility)</i>
<u>Energy</u> : Attracts Creatives	I	<u>Stagnation</u> : Managers are left
	I	
1st Quadrant	I	4th Quadrant

As presented by Hope Partnership facilitators, the above diagram shows the four-phase life-cycle of growth and decline that every church will go through, multiple times in the case of a long-lived church. In a long-lived church, within approximately every forty years, some internal or external impetus arises that causes the congregation to think of itself and its ministry in a new way. This can occur with the arrival of new pastoral or lay leadership that is able to imagine and describe a new chapter of ministry, it can come from a dramatic and pressing change in the surrounding community that demands attention. It can come from a similar dramatic change in the makeup of the congregation that changes its demographic significantly enough to call for new ministry forms, and it can even come through otherwise seemingly catastrophic events. A timely major natural disaster or fire can truly be answered prayer for a leader looking for a way to jump-start a transformative change within the life of a congregation. Even the death of a beloved senior saint can be the impetus for change in congregational leadership and a subsequent re-imagining of what ministry might look like. (As an old Pastor’s aside goes: A church is often

³³ Hope Partnership: New Beginnings Cluster Group Power Point presentation, First Christian Church Whittier, May 21, 2013.

one funeral away from rebirth. And a second like it: A good fire with full insurance can be seen as answered prayer.)

When this transformational new identity coincides with the end of the second quadrant or somewhere in the middle of the third quadrant, it may seem to those inside and outside the church that nothing has changed, as seemingly organic changes in program and facility use energize the majority of the congregation and appeal to new members. The older minority who will always mourn the passing of the good old days will be swept along in the energy and passion for the new phase of ministry, or will leave. While it is always likely that *someone* is going to vote with their feet in the face of change, when it happens in the midst of a *new narrative* being told about who we are, it becomes more bearable than when people leave in the declining years of the lower third and fourth quadrants. When John and Sally Pewsitter walk away in the midst of an exciting new direction that 200 members have committed themselves to, their absence is not all that painful or notable. When they walk away in the waning fourth quadrant period, as perhaps seventy or fewer members struggle to fill leadership positions and pay the bills, it can feel catastrophic.

For those remaining seventy members, and even more so for the fifteen to twenty in leadership carrying the workload, every departure in a fourth quadrant era is amplified by the pressing need to keep the massive ship afloat. Burdened with a corporate-sized campus manned by a family-sized church, it is easy to understand how church leaders come to believe that their primary (if not sole) job is to fill the pews and fill the rosters in order to carry out the work and pay the bills that the aging campus demands. McLaren asks plaintively: “Could it be that the Spirit of God is calling the church to stop trying to save itself, and instead to join God in saving

the world? Could pouring out itself for the good of the world be the only way for the church to save its own soul?”³⁴

It is sadly ironic that as people who profess belief in a God of Resurrection Power, we work so doggedly to avoid the death of certain modes of ministry. I am sure that God must be looking at us in a bemused or chagrinned way and saying, “I have the most amazing resurrection waiting in the wings for you, if only you would *die!*”

Sadly, many churches struggle on, clinging limply to life-support. Without a new identity or renewed sense of purpose occurring in *some fashion* before or during the third quadrant of the current cycle, a congregation is likely to continue a numerical and energy-level downward slide. As the creative and passionate risk-takers attracted to formation of the first two quadrants become less and less needed (due to the successful formation of programs and policies that support those programs), and the risk-averse *managers* of programs become more entrenched in leadership positions, it becomes harder and harder for the church to do something truly new. (It must be said that these are broad generalizations, and that of course there are creative managers to be sure. But by and large risk-takers are attracted and valued in the earliest phases of a new ministry model, and by and large risk-averse managers are attracted and valued in the waning phases of a dwindling ministry.)

Pressured managers who have been handed once-successful programs and structures and the over-sized facilities that housed them are not likely to see the need for broad and sweeping changes; their inclination will be to look for quick fixes in staffing and funding (rearranging the chairs on the Titanic), or growth tools that will again provide the results (numbers) that the programs and structures provided before and that the over-sized campus still demands.

³⁴ McLaren, *The Great Spiritual Migration*, 148.

The further along this downward spiral the congregation travels, the steeper the decline becomes, and the tighter most congregational managers will grip the wheel and more firmly believe this is *not* the time to try something risky. In the face of dwindling resources and growing costs of aging buildings, most managers call for an era of prudence, of belt-tightening, and of asking even more from the stretched-thin-yet-still-willing volunteer leadership and paid staff. “It’s time for us to re-double our efforts and get serious about *growth!*” becomes the rally cry.

Church of England Bishop John Inge, in his 2003 book *A Christian Theology of Place*, maintains:

If we are to avoid churches becoming museums, they must be allowed to live and breathe by being re-ordered, adapted and changed to reflect the life of the contemporary Christian community ... However, it must be admitted that sometimes when churches become museums they do accurately reflect the state of the Christian community in that place. This is when buildings become idolatrous—attachment is to building as building, rather than building as sign and sacrament—but this is merely derivative of the fact that the Christian community has lost its way and is taking the building with it into the wilderness.³⁵

Diana Butler Bass knows that, unfortunately, and writes, “The old ways do not work, and there are few obvious new paths.”³⁶ Without hiring a hit man or an arsonist, many pastors today are looking for some way to kick-start an internal spiritual and energetic change within the congregation that encourages or forces these faithful remaining managers and pew sitters to loosen their grips and to become a little more *risky* and a little more imaginative—or at least allow others to imagine and risk.

³⁵ John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 121–22.

³⁶ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion: The End Of Church And The Birth Of A New Spiritual Awakening* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012), 48.

Creating Liminality: Journeying as a Spiritual Tool

“Arise, for it is your task, and we are with you; be strong and do it.”³⁷

“One ‘discovers’ not by being told, but by *doing*;
the spirituality of imperfection is necessarily pragmatic.”³⁸

I have found one of the hardest things to get an aging congregation to do is to *go* anywhere. Senior saints ask, “We have this nice place right here, why would we *go* anywhere?” Aside from their comfort in their church home, there are considerations like not feeling safe driving to new places, uncertainty about accessibility once they arrive, and a general aversion to the unfamiliar. So often, when I have suggested a retreat setting for an administrative or fellowship function or worship event, I have been met with some version of, “What’s wrong with right *here*?” It’s frustrating because I know that a change of scenery can be so impactful if one wishes to dream or imagine anything new. When we are sitting in the middle of our oh-so-familiar building and going through our too familiar routines, we even know just what chairs we sit in for any particular meeting in any particular room. (How could we possibly imagine a new mission and vision pathway if we could never imagine sitting in a different orientation for a meeting?)

Once Elder Bill walks into the meeting room and sits in his customary chair he relates to Treasurer Sally and the rest of the group in the manner dictated and deeply ingrained by their positions and relationship patterns over the years and decades. The business at hand is thought of in the time-honored way. The very act of crossing the threshold into any one of the same old rooms begins to shape and limit the possibilities of what we are able to imagine there or

³⁷ Ezra 10:4 (RSV).

³⁸ Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham, *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Search for Meaning* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 102.

elsewhere. We are *bounded* by what we habitually see and the configuration of what has seemingly always been there. We can't see the forest for the trees and we can't see a pathway ahead for our focus on the road behind.

Movement, a change of venue, shaking things up, forcing the need to think on our feet a little bit, increasing the chance for things to go really wrong and just maybe wonderfully right—that's what I've wanted to provide for my congregants and myself. It's what I think many of us need at this time.

What is it about *going out there* that is so freeing?

Journey as a *liminoid* experience

“A wandering Aramean was my father;
and he went down to Egypt and he sojourned there”³⁹

“A pilgrim is one who divests himself [or herself] of the mundane concomitants of religion – which become entangled with its practice in the local situation – to confront, in a special ‘far’ milieu, the basic elements and structures of his [or her] faith in their unshielded, virgin radiance.”⁴⁰

In their book, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, influential anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner describe the experience of *going out there* as entering into *liminality*.⁴¹ They point out that “[r]ites of passage are the transitional rituals accompanying changes of place, state, social position, and age in a culture. They have a basically tripartite processual structure, consisting of three phases: *separation*, *margin or limen*, and *reaggregation*. The first phase detaches the ritual subjects from their old places in society; the last installs them, inwardly transformed and outwardly changed, in a new place in society.”⁴² Turner and Turner find that it

³⁹ Deuteronomy 26:5 (RSV).

⁴⁰ Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 15.

⁴¹ Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, 2–3.

⁴² Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, 249.

is in the marginal/liminal state between the status quo and a new context that individuals and groups can free themselves from past habits and norms by physically changing locale. The state of liminality “is not only transition but also potentiality, not only ‘going to be’ but also ‘what may be.’”⁴³

Internal, contextual changes can happen in this state of liminality (from the Latin *limen*, a threshold).⁴⁴ We liminars (journeyers) are no longer bound by the characteristics that held us linked to our old selves as they are left behind. Turner and Turner maintain that Liminars become wonderfully ambiguous as they are now “betwixt and between” and “are stripped of status and authority, removed from a social structure maintained and sanctioned by power and force, and leveled to a homogeneous social state through discipline and ordeal.”⁴⁵ Crossing this threshold into liminal space offers a transformational process which allows for a congregation to move from a habitual worship and space-oriented mindset into other specific mind-space alternatives, thereby opening them to new discernment perspectives for imagining and living into alternatives to their present congregational formation and location.

Once we cross the threshold we have left behind the old rules and become freed even from the limitations of our old relationships with one another as we are forced to deal with each other and the world in totally new contexts. Old barriers and bondings may be discarded as new relationships are experienced, some of which will come back with us to become part of the new *we* that we have become on the journey. Back at home, before committing to a journey rite of passage, safely ensconced in her usual seat and functioning in her usual role in the old building,

⁴³ Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, 3. Emphasis mine.

⁴⁴ Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, 249.

⁴⁵ Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, 249.

the thirty-year church treasurer may sit rigidly secure in her never-changing role, but the ambiguity of a journey puts everything up for grabs.

If we can somehow cross the threshold, God can work with us in this marvelous liminal space between what we once were and what we might become. According to Turner and Turner, “Pilgrimage has some of the liminal phase attributes in passage rites: release from mundane structure; homogenization of status; ... reflection on the meaning of religious and cultural core-values; ritualized reenactment of correspondences between a religious paradigm and shared human experiences ...”⁴⁶ Where we may have been trapped by the *mundane* and the unquestioned *habitual* before we crossed the threshold, our physical movement itself helps to experience a new thing as opposed to the way we’ve always done it. Out here, on the other side of the threshold, we experience *transience*. Turner and Turner provide this definition:

“Transience also expressed as nomadism, (or) movement ... (a) rich metaphor for what lies outside structure or between structures, or in a dissolvent of structure. Transience is exemplified by the liminal religious man (person) who renounces world and home, moving from village to village—the pilgrim, or the hero of the ‘quest’ tales, who goes on a long journey to seek his (or her) identity outside structure.”⁴⁷

Long before I became acquainted with the work of Turner & Turner and the concept of liminality, I instinctively knew the power of a change of scenery and the benefit of standing up and walking out the door in search of that new scenery. I wish that I could say that I had landed on the idea of pilgrimage as a spiritual tool via prayerful biblical study; but no, there was no moment when a passage leapt from the page and spoke to me while poring over scripture in my study late at night. It was actually in the midst of more of a frustrated walking prayer: “Dear

⁴⁶ Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, 254.

⁴⁷ Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, 250.

God, How can we get *out of here* for a while so that we can free ourselves up from these deep ruts? How can I convince the congregation to leave here and share potentially meaningful worship experiences somewhere else? I wish we could just hit the road for a while...”

Hit the road? Wait a minute, I thought, that sounds familiar...and slowly at first and then more and more rapidly, all of the journey imagery from the bible came flooding to me. In his book, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, Hebrew Bible scholar Walter Brueggemann notes that virtually our entire bible is a travel narrative, and to possess biblical faith means to pick up and *go* time and time again.⁴⁸

While I would no doubt be met with blank stares from church leaders if I suggested that we would all benefit from a Processual Ritual which would provide a Liminal Experience, I was pretty sure that even the most change-averse congregant (even the most firmly entrenched manager) would have a harder time arguing about engaging in a concretely biblical activity rather than some other crazy new thing the pastor had cooked up. To go on a pilgrimage, we would not be doing anything *new*; in fact we would be taking part in a very ancient tradition. Emulating our biblical forefathers and the countless saints across the ages, we would intentionally leave home to seek a closer experience with God and to listen for what God might speak to us out there. I’m not always the most inspiring or convincing pastor, but if I couldn’t sell the congregation on the benefits of a pilgrimage I’d better find another line of work.

⁴⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (London: SPCK, 1978), 13.

Chapter Two

A Journey Away from Self and Toward God

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”⁴⁹

“You do not think your self into a new way of living,
you live yourself into a new way of thinking.”⁵⁰

In this chapter I will examine three types of journeying, Pilgrimage, Wandering, and Sojourn, that are scripturally recorded as being effective in helping God’s people escape the bounds of our day-to-day habitual existence, freeing us for heightened or closer, more intimate experiences of the Divine, and allowing God to work transformation within us and through us. These three journeys will be helpful to the modern church as spiritual practices that we might utilize to help us become spiritually and physically un-stuck today.

While pilgrimage, wandering, and sojourning share some characteristics and are sometimes interchangeably spoken of, there are distinctions that can be made about these forms of journey.

Brueggemann writes about the connection of the people of Israel to the land and observes that “a sense of place is a human hunger” and “a fresh look at the bible suggests that a sense of place is a primary category of faith.”⁵¹ However, Brueggemann also draws our attention to the scriptural witness of a people on the move.⁵² He indicates that “the Bible itself is primarily

⁴⁹ Proverbs 3:5–6 (RSV).

⁵⁰ Rohr, *Eager to Love*, 201.

⁵¹ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 4.

⁵² Brueggemann, *The Land*, 13–15. See also a talk, “Biblical, Theological & Ecclesiological Foundations for Pilgrimage” given by Fr. Thomas Rosica, CSB, to the National Association of Shrine and Pilgrimage Apostolate (NAPSA) in Buffalo, New York, as recorded in *Salt and Light Media*, November 15, 2013, accessed November 12, 2017, <http://saltandlighttv.org/blogfeed/getpost.php?id=52387>.

concerned with the issues of being displaced and yearning for a place.”⁵³ From Adam and Eve being sent from the garden and out to make their own way in the world (Genesis 3:23–24) all the way through John’s dream of a Holy City that is still to come (Revelation 21:1–2), God’s people have been asked to consider themselves as pilgrims on a journey and as part of a movement rather than as inheritors of a static and ordered existence that they are to maintain.

Along the way, however, certain witnesses have had wonderful breaks from their regular daily existence wherein God was experienced in extraordinary and meaningful ways. We subsequent faithful followers and seekers are encouraged by their example throughout scriptures to do what we can to replicate these former encounters and increase our own experiences by physically placing ourselves beyond the bounds of our daily existence and finding/creating holy ground where we become more aware of God’s presence and whereby God becomes more available to us.

Philip Sheldrake says, “Memory imbedded in place ... involves more than simply any one personal story. There are the wider and deeper narrative currents in a place that gather together all those who have ever lived there. Each person effectively reshapes a place by making his or her story a thread in the meaning of the place and also has to come to terms with the many layers of story that already exist in a given location.”⁵⁴

Certainly memories associated with a place such as a sanctuary can be deeply ingrained in a congregation’s identity and are difficult to escape. Religious historian Jonathan Z. Smith quotes poet philosopher G. Bachelard as saying, “Home is the place where memories are

⁵³ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 2.

⁵⁴ Sheldrake, *Spaces For The Sacred*, 16.

housed.”⁵⁵ We rightly call our sanctuaries our church home and the memories stored there are deep and seductive in their power. Unfortunately, in many instances, it would appear that our memories have become a weighty anchor firmly lodged in the past.

Pilgrimage – finding God in High Places

“... and many peoples shall come, and say:
‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.’”⁵⁶

“A pilgrimage is a journey of one or more persons to holy places of devotion and tradition, perhaps to fulfill a promise and/or to obtain a grace. At the origin of this decision there is a desire for change, which can gradually lead to rearranging or reorienting one’s choices in life from a faith perspective. To go on pilgrimage means to go out of one’s self and away from the routine of one’s habits in order to set out towards the horizon indicated by the Lord, as Abraham did, our Father in faith ...”⁵⁷

After hiking uphill all day to finally reach a particularly scenic promontory I will mentally exclaim, “Surely God dwells here!” The stillness, the scenic grandeur, the rarified air, and the effort exerted to reach this place all combine to make me feel that this place is spiritually special and therefore more prone to produce a mountaintop experience of God than I could ever hope to find, for example, at my desk at home. There are high places that literally lift us up and out of the ordinary; that allow for, perhaps, an altered view of consciousness and our perceived reality. In the attained grander view and resulting experience of awe, we are permitted a glimpse of the holy beyond. These spaces are what Dr. Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, in her book

⁵⁵ Smith, *To Take Place*, 29. Smith notes; “I have borrowed this phrase, that home is where “*un grand nombre de nous souvenirs sont loges*,” from G. Bachelard, *La poetique de l’espace*, 5th ed. (Paris, 1967), 27.

⁵⁶ Isaiah 2:3 (RSV).

⁵⁷ Rosica, “Biblical, Theological & Ecclesiological Foundations for Pilgrimage.”

Pilgrimage—the Sacred Art: Journey to the Center of the Heart, calls “thin spaces,” where “the feeling of the presence of the spiritual is so strong that it is palpable.”⁵⁸

Add to this thin space experience any sort of shrine, altar, or iconic symbol (a stack of rocks, a cross, even a bench situated to better appreciate the view) left behind by some previous climber-visitor, and my experience is somehow confirmed and therefore heightened. Aha! Someone else has been here before and agrees that this place is special.

Our scriptural ancestors had these mountaintop experiences and they have been recounted and recorded as part of our biblical witness that God has been in the past and therefore can now and will in the future be available to us in these same high places.

In a 1973 *Ministry Matters* article, then Professor of Old Testament Studies at Andrews University Lawrence T. Geraty offered a concise overview of these high places and their place in the development of the official religion of the Jewish faithful. Geraty posits the following:

Our term high place comes from the Hebrew *bamah*, which literally translates as *ridge* and predates specific Hebrew religious practices, likely having been used by even earlier Canaanite peoples. Over time a *bamah* came to mean any place where the elements of high place religious rites and practices occurred, not necessarily topographical mountaintops or man-made elevated sites. Originally, a high place would have been situated on a wooded elevation, and would most likely have included an erected tall stone (pillar) and at least one altar where sacrifices would have been burned, plus some types of images or icons relating to whichever cultic community (ies) used the site.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, *Pilgrimage—the Sacred Art: Journey to the Center of the Heart* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2013), 79.

⁵⁹ Lawrence T. Geraty, “The ‘High Place’ in Biblical Archeology,” *Ministry Matters: International Journal for Pastors*, Archives/August 1973, accessed July 5, 2018, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1973/08/the-high-place-in-biblical-archeology>. This is not an intact direct quote, but rather my condensation and paraphrasing of Geraty which does retain much of his original language.

One picture from the biblical narratives indicates the presence of multiple high places over time. The practice seemed to be that one was free to worship at a high place that was convenient.

The people were sacrificing at the high places, however, because no house had yet been built for the name of the LORD.

Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father; only, he sacrificed and burnt incense at the high places.

And the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings upon that altar.⁶⁰

Another picture reveals a tradition that called the people to the recognition of one acceptable high place. These biblical narratives spell out rituals, rules, and commands that urged conformity of thought and practice.

As we see above, the narrative from 1 Kings indicates that the people sacrificed at multiple high places because no single high place, namely the temple in Jerusalem, had been built. As a priestly class developed and religious rites became codified, an entire system developed spelling out the when and how much should be offered at the altars of these high places.

However, with the temple cult came:

But you shall seek the place which the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there; thither you shall go, and thither you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the offering that you present, your votive offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herd and of your flock⁶¹

and

But when you go over the Jordan, and live in the land which the LORD your God gives you to inherit, and when he gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you live in safety, then to the place which the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there, thither you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your

⁶⁰ 1 Kings 3:2–4 (RSV).

⁶¹ Deuteronomy 12:5–6 (RSV).

sacrifices, your tithes and the offering that you present, and all your votive offerings which you vow to the LORD.⁶²

With Jerusalem becoming the center of religious and political power, it also became *the* high place for pilgrimage. In his 1996 work titled *Jesus the Pilgrim*, Sean Freyne, then Professor of Theology at Trinity College, Dublin, wrote, “The religious literature of Judaism—psalms, narratives, visionary literature and legal codes—building on the Deuteronomic ideal sees the Jerusalem temple as the symbolic centre of a shared belief system ... For all who shared this Jewish world of belief, whether they came from Babylon, Asia Minor, Egypt, Rome or Galilee, the Jerusalem temple provided a shared focal point.”⁶³

Once it had been so firmly established by priestly and monarchic decree that God preferred or demanded sacrifice at *the* high place in Jerusalem, the spiritual practice of pilgrimage became an integral part of being a faithful Jew. Wherever you may have come to live, God (or at least God’s priests and kings) expected and mandated that as part of being a faithful Jew you would make the journey at least-three times a year to worship in Jerusalem:

Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place which he will choose: at the feast of unleavened bread, at the feast of weeks, and at the feast of booths. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed...⁶⁴

To stay away from these pilgrimages was to be unfaithful. When the people failed to make this pilgrimage, God grieved and the very temple mount itself was seen as joining God in grieving:

The roads to Zion mourn, for none come to the appointed feasts; all her gates are desolate, her priests groan; her maidens have been dragged away, and she herself suffers bitterly.⁶⁵

⁶² Deuteronomy 12:10–11 (RSV).

⁶³ Sean Freyne, “Jesus the Pilgrim,” in *Pilgrimage*, eds. Virgil Elizondo and Sean Freyne (London: SCM Press, 1996), 26–27.

⁶⁴ Deuteronomy 16:16 (RSV).

⁶⁵ Lamentations 1:4 (RSV).

And so anything short of *going up* to Jerusalem, any decision to remain at some lower or lesser place to worship, was now to be guilty of false worship—to place your faith and trust in a false idol rather than in the one who is sought after by journeying and going up.

In her recent book, *Pilgrimage—the Sacred Art: Journey to the Center of the Heart*, Claremont School of Theology’s Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook points out that beyond the trip up to the actual Jerusalem Temple Mount, any trip more broadly to Israel itself came to be seen as “going up”.⁶⁶

A prophetic vision became something of a longed-for goal of the faithful:

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.⁶⁷

and

Many nations shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.⁶⁸

This journey was not meant to be a burden, but rather a cause for celebration, and joyous festivals awaited the faithful at the conclusion of their trek up to Jerusalem: “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD!’”⁶⁹

Jesus/Gospel Pilgrimage to Temple

“Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom.”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Kujawa-Holbrook, *Pilgrimage—the Sacred Art*, 16.

⁶⁷ Isaiah 2:2–3 (RSV).

⁶⁸ Micah 4:2 (RSV).

⁶⁹ Psalm 122:1 (RSV).

Of course, as part of a faithful Jewish family and community, Jesus inherited this tradition of making the pilgrimage journey to the temple in Jerusalem. Our only scriptural reference to the years of his youth occurs during one such pilgrimage. We also have scriptural testimony that Jesus made the festival pilgrimage in his adult years: “After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.”⁷¹

And, of course, it was during such a pilgrimage festival that Jesus endured his Passion ordeal. The Gospels record that Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem was as part of the crowd of festival pilgrims:

And they brought the colt to Jesus, and threw their garments on it; and he sat upon it. And many spread their garments on the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed cried out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming! Hosanna in the highest!” And he entered Jerusalem, and went into the temple; and when he had looked round at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.⁷²

Christian Pilgrimage to The Holy Land and Other Distant Shrines

“A place thus becomes a shrine by the experience within it of the presence of the sacred to an extraordinary degree.”⁷³

As Christianity developed in Jesus’ Jewish footsteps, far-flung believers came to desire a physical, geographical closeness to the same environs Jesus and his disciples had inhabited, to physically walk where Jesus had walked. Naturally, Jerusalem (and more broadly “The Holy Land”) became a destination for those now geographically scattered faithful who also sought to go up to some place that could help them escape the bounds of their daily existence.

⁷⁰ Luke 2:41–42 (RSV).

⁷¹ John 5:1 (RSV).

⁷² Mark 11:7–11 (RSV).

⁷³ Jaime R. Vidal, “Pilgrimage in the Christian Tradition” in *Pilgrimage*, eds. Virgil Elizondo and Sean Freyne (London: SCM Press, 1996), 26–27.

Although there is written testimony of religiously motivated journeys to Palestine by Christians in the second and third centuries CE⁷⁴, certainly the pilgrimage boom occurred following the Constantinian legalization and state-supported promotion of the religion. Constantine's mother, the Empress Helena, is credited with the discovery, preservation, and public display of various relics and sites referred to in the Gospels, particularly the Passion narratives. Her establishment of basilicas in Jerusalem and Bethlehem "began the tradition of pilgrimage to the Holy land, which continues to the present day."⁷⁵ Over the centuries the discovery of other relics including the remains of various saints made possible pilgrimage sites far flung from Jerusalem.

In his book *School of the Pilgrim: An Alternative Path to Christian Growth*, Brett Webb-Mitchell, Presbyterian minister and founder and director of the School of the Pilgrim, an interfaith formation center in Chapel Hill, North Carolina gives these "5 Common Medieval pilgrimage characteristics":

1. Belief that the place they are going is where miracles happened, are continuing to happen, and might happen again – "hotlines to God".
2. Purpose is to get out and away from a place where there have been occasions to sin.
3. Penitence—an imitation of Christ with sacrifice and exile—initiating and entering a level of existence deeper than what the pilgrim had known in everyday life.
4. A pilgrim is never alone—there are no "Lone Rangers" on pilgrimage.
5. Leave a certain place and go to a specific destination, though they may not know exactly what to expect at the point of arrival.⁷⁶

Brett Webb-Mitchell holds that what every pilgrim seeks is some sort of "transformation or change wrought by a *physical journey with a faith-filled intent*."⁷⁷ For the church of today,

⁷⁴ Diana Webb, *Medieval European Pilgrimage* (New York: Palgrave Publishing, 2002), 1.

⁷⁵ Kujawa-Holbrook, *Pilgrimage—the Sacred Art*, 21.

⁷⁶ Brett Webb-Mitchell, *School of the Pilgrim: An Alternative Path to Christian Growth* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 17.

⁷⁷ Webb-Mitchell, *School of the Pilgrim*, 20. Emphasis mine.

stuck in our ways and burdened with the dreams, programs, and buildings of yesterday's church, laden with the sin of looking back over our shoulders in an idolatrous manner at the glory-days of the past, there is much to be offered by embarking on just such physical journeys with a faith-filled intent. As Turner and Turner attest, "It is true that a pilgrim returns to his [or her] former mundane existence, but it is commonly believed that he [or she] has made a spiritual step forward."⁷⁸

In addition to pilgrimage, I want now to look at two other types of physical journeys that provide for a liminal experience that we find in scriptures and may therefore also claim as part of our Christian heritage: *Wandering* and *Sojourning*.

WANDERING

"Now the LORD said to Abram,
'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house
to the land that I will show you.'"⁷⁹

"Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said,
'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel,
Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.'"⁸⁰

"God can only be met in emptiness, by those who come in love, abandoning all effort to control, every need to astound ... The God of the bible is an elusive one. The only guarantee of divine availability is God's own promise to be present to those who empty themselves in perfect trust."⁸¹

Unlike a pilgrimage, where the faithful are called to journey *to* a specific destination, God also calls us *away*. Throughout our bible, God calls the faithful away from our places of comfort and onto journeys where we are asked to meet or find or acknowledge God's presence in the otherness of foreign places and peoples. We are asked to leave behind comfort, familiarity, and

⁷⁸ Turner and Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage*, 15.

⁷⁹ Genesis 12:1 (RSV).

⁸⁰ Exodus 5:1 (RSV).

⁸¹ Belden C. Lane, *The Solace Of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert And Mountain Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 63.

security. Our patriarch Abraham is given no map, no place-name as a goal, and no compass reading—only the instruction to *go* and the assurance, “I will show you.”⁸²

Like Abraham, we later faithful likewise are sometimes asked by God to *go* first, and to find out who, what, where, why and how later.

In the wilderness wanderings of the Exodus narratives, God’s people experience God’s direction and guidance on a *need to know* basis, and are asked to trust that God will provide *what* is needed *when* it is needed. *Wandering* may seem to connote the image of being lost, or moving around in a seemingly aimless manner. However, one is not without a guide; God is acknowledged as the one who calls the people forward. The people were asked to keep putting one foot in front of the other with no goal other than to follow and trust in God for direction and sustenance. Even Moses and his leadership team received their directions on a need to know basis, with God saying in effect, just keep moving; don’t worry about the ultimate destination, just keep sight of the cloud or flame I hold before you. (Exodus 13:21)

Walter Brueggemann writes that Israel in the wilderness may be seen as “having nothing, yet lacking nothing.”⁸³ In his description of the wilderness itself, he writes, “The place of all lacks, because Yahweh is present, is where nothing is lacking.”⁸⁴ In wilderness wanderings, beyond the known, the habitual, and the foreseeable—we are forced to abandon all hopes of providing for ourselves and to depend instead on a providential God. *Our* plans become meaningless as we desperately try to simply keep up with God. Brueggemann makes this

⁸² Genesis 12:1 (RSV).

⁸³ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 28.

⁸⁴ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 44.

important distinction, “The wanderer is different from the sojourner-pilgrim because he [or she] is not on the way anywhere. He [or she] is in a situation in which survival is the key question.”⁸⁵

Wanderers will undoubtedly ask, “Could God not take us on the easier, quicker route?” To put it simply, NO! There are times when God needs to drastically break us apart from what we have hunkered-down into in order to point us toward a future that we cannot see or as yet imagine. As Brueggemann says of the promise made to Abraham that set the stage for so many more promises of many more new starts “...this new history requires a wrenching departure, an abandonment of what is, for that which is not, but which is promised ...”⁸⁶

We have baggage we need to lose on the way, things to unlearn, idolatrous dependencies we need to break, old dreams of former generations that need to die or become transformed, and the wilderness is the setting where God can take us through these breaks, deaths, and transformations. Belden C. Lane describes himself as a Presbyterian minister teaching at a Roman Catholic University telling Jewish stories. In his book, *The Solace Of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert And Mountain Spirituality*, he says of the Hebrew Exodus, “God intentionally opted for the more difficult landscape as if this were habitually the divine preference. God’s people are deliberately forced into the desert—taking the harder, more onerous and hazardous route—as an exacting exercise in radical faith.”⁸⁷ Lane goes on to draw a line of comparison between God’s use of the wilderness in the Old Testament Exodus narrative and the New Testament Gospel ministry of Jesus: “Jesus repeatedly leads people into hostile landscapes, away from society and its conventions, to invite them into something altogether new ... Desert and

⁸⁵ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 9.

⁸⁶ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 18.

⁸⁷ Lane, *Solace Of Fierce Landscapes*, 44.

mountain locations, located on the margins of society, are locations of choice in luring God's people to a deeper understanding of who they are."⁸⁸

As I mentioned earlier, however much time he may have spent worshipping and teaching in formal religious settings, Jesus was also a critic of the ways religious practice had become stale and rigid in those formal settings and often took himself and his followers *away* from them. Jesus prepared himself for ministry by going *away* to the wilderness; not by traveling *in to* the Temple to pray or offer sacrifices: "At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan."⁸⁹ Throughout the Gospel narratives, Jesus *goes away* in an effort to reconnect with God:

And early in the morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there.⁹⁰

And immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the multitude away. And after bidding them farewell, he departed to the mountain to pray.⁹¹

But He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray.⁹²

And it was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray.⁹³

In his moment of most extreme spiritual anguish, when he desperately needed to be in communion with God, Jesus did not head *in* to Temple or synagogue – he went *out*:

And they came to a place called Gethsemane; and He said to His disciples, "Sit here until I have prayed." And He took with Him Peter and James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. And He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch." And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground, and began praying.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Lane, *Solace Of Fierce Landscapes*, 44–46.

⁸⁹ Mark 1:12–13 (RSV).

⁹⁰ Mark 1:35 (RSV).

⁹¹ Mark 6:45–46 (RSV).

⁹² Luke 5:16 (RSV).

⁹³ Luke 6:12 (RSV).

⁹⁴ Mark 14:32–34 (RSV).

Belden C. Lane notes the ways in which Jesus uses physical disorientation to spiritually dis-orient his followers from their deeply ingrained religious expectations and prejudices: “Jesus is always redefining the nature of ‘center.’ He moves regularly beyond the safety and exclusiveness of the Jewish homeland in Galilee to include Gentiles in the outlying regions where his disciples are reluctant to go. He functions repeatedly as a boundary crosser, pushing his disciples to edges they find exceedingly uncomfortable ... He knows that places on the edge, those considered God-forsaken by many, are where his identity as Messiah has to be revealed. Out in the wilds anything can happen.”⁹⁵ One may conclude that Jesus intentionally takes his followers into a liminal state.

For a modern church that has become so dependent on the trappings and comforts of home, so used to basking in the glow of our yester-years, some time *wandering* out in the wilds would do the body good. We also acknowledge that there are times when in the midst of a journey God asks that we stay for a period in one new place and among one new people because there is something we are to learn in a temporary stay there. We are sometimes asked to *sojourn*.

SOJOURN

“Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you,
for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands,
and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham.”⁹⁶

“(Sojourn) is being where one does not belong and cannot settle in
and having to survive there, all because of promise.”⁹⁷

Brueggemann says that “[s]ojourner” is a technical word usually described as ‘resident alien.’ It means to be in a place, perhaps for an extended time, to live there and take some roots,

⁹⁵ Lane, *Solace Of Fierce Landscapes*, 46.

⁹⁶ Genesis 26:3 (RSV).

⁹⁷ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 7.

but to always be an outsider, never belonging, always without rights, title, or voice in decisions that matter.”⁹⁸

There are times when mid-journey, we are asked to pause and to take note of the differences and similarities between ourselves, the outsiders, and the natives of the strange land in which we temporarily reside. What differences can we set aside? What similarities can we celebrate? What distinguishing characteristics of theirs may we adopt without surrendering our heritage? What are the absolutes or inviolates that we must retain? If and when we are again allowed to return home or reach a promised new land, what lessons will we have learned about who we are and about who we are meant to be? Can we be who we are meant to be even if we do things in this strange, new way? No matter how short or long our stay with the *others* might be, the knowledge that we are not putting down permanent roots among them will keep us in a place of continual discernment as to the differences between what we left, where we were/are headed, and what is our current context.

In this chapter, so far, we have examined three fundamental concepts that present us with images of our individual and corporate spiritual journeys, namely pilgrimage, wandering, and sojourning.

Pilgrimage refers to a journey away from home, to a specific place, in order to inspire or revitalize oneself by recreating an experience of the Divine or a sacred event.

Wandering evokes a spiritual journey away from home without a clear sense of direction, intentionally adrift and trusting that God will find and/or guide you.

⁹⁸ Brueggemann, *The Land*, 7.

Sojourn demands that while on a journey to another ultimate destination, one pauses or assumes temporary residence among a foreign people/culture—trusting that God will somehow teach something about God’s self or oneself in the experience.

All of these acts of journeying require that one leaves home.

Remembering More Than Who We Have Been; Remembering Who We Are Meant to Be

“The Lord our God said to us in Horeb, ‘You have stayed long enough at this mountain. Turn and take your journey, and go to the hill country of the Amorites and to all their neighbors in the Arabah, in the hill country and in the lowland and in the Negeb and by the seacoast, the land of the Canaanites, and Lebanon, as far as the great river, the river Euphrates. See, I have set the land before you.’”⁹⁹

“We are forever on the edge of hubris when we think that our story, our generation, our country is the best, or the favorite one of God.”¹⁰⁰

In 1869, in his travel book *The Innocents Abroad, or The New Pilgrims’ Progress*, the sagacious American author and prophet Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) wryly prescribed travel as the antidote to many societal ills: “Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one’s lifetime.”¹⁰¹ Nearly 150 years after, the modern church would do well to heed his admonition to travel.

For the church stuck in reverie and caught in the trap of trying to recapture a fifty-year-old dream, catching on to an even *older* and venerated practice can help to break loose the rusty cogs and free up the mired spiritual wheels. It has been said that many new journeys cross old

⁹⁹ Deuteronomy 1:6–8 (RSV).

¹⁰⁰ Webb-Mitchell, *School of the Pilgrim*, 74.

¹⁰¹ Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad, Or: The New Pilgrim’s Process* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 650. Quoted in Joerg Rieger, *Traveling* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 7.

bridges, and embarking on a new spiritual journey upon the old bridge of pilgrimage is in many ways more trustworthy than trying yet another revitalization program of the month.

For Diana Butler Bass the church doesn't so much need to create some newfangled practice to free itself, as it needs to trust old paths. She writes, "When it comes to religion, the Great Turning is less of a turn toward something completely new and unknown; it is more of a Great Returning to an ancient understanding, of finding a forgotten path of wonder and awe through the wilderness of human chaos and change."¹⁰² The ancient practice of pilgrimage can take us on a journey out and away with a promise that we will return having been in some way enlivened in the process. Kujawa-Holbrook says that "[o]n some level, pilgrimage always connotes a life-changing journey"¹⁰³ and "integral to pilgrimage is the journey home and the pilgrims' need to integrate the life they have lived with new insights gained as they return changed persons."¹⁰⁴

Bruce Webb-Mitchell reminds us that "traditionally, one of the primary reasons that one went on pilgrimage in the first place was because one had erred or blundered in one's personal life ... the way to seek reparation, to be forgiven for one's sinful ways, acts, gestures, or habits, is to go on a pilgrimage. Pilgrimage, sin, and penance are bound together."¹⁰⁵ No matter how big we once were, no matter how prosperous, how influential, how impressive, we have not yet arrived. In his book, *Biblical Authority or Biblical Tyranny: Scripture and the Christian Pilgrimage*, William Countryman puts it this way: "Whenever we seem to have settled down and

¹⁰² Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion*, 97.

¹⁰³ Kujawa-Holbrook, *Pilgrimage—the Sacred Art*, 4.

¹⁰⁴ Kujawa-Holbrook, *Pilgrimage—the Sacred Art*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Webb-Mitchell, *School of the Pilgrim*, 111.

found our true identity and come to the fulfillment of our lives, it is time to repent and take up the sacred journey again.”¹⁰⁶

As we gather every week in our much-loved and timeworn grooves in the pews, we settle back into an idolatrous relationship with the stained glass, the pipe organ, the familiar liturgy, and the time-honored seating arrangement where we all know just where *our* pew is in relationship to everyone else. We have become guilty of the sin of misplacing and ignoring the God who told us “I am doing a new thing!”¹⁰⁷ Webb-Mitchell laments, “In many of the congregations I have pastored, the people feel they have ‘arrived’ at the gates of heaven. They have found their chair or their pew, and every Sunday they sit in that space for an hour or so with no one else venturing into that space. Their ‘heaven’ is a wooden pew by a certain stained glass window.”¹⁰⁸ Or beneath the pipe organ, and all that really keeps it from being heaven on earth is that there are not enough people around them to make it feel like the good old days or enough to help them pay the bills and do the work of maintaining this beloved *bamah* of theirs.

So often, try as we might as we sit in these same old places, we are unable to imagine that new thing God is trying to do and are therefore unable to imagine or join God in the doing of it. Webb-Mitchell speaks for so many pastors when he says “there is a sense that the church, the body of Christ, does not often have the sensation of being on the move. Our churches feel like they are stuck in a rut on the roadside, unable—or so it seems—to move forward. With the language of pilgrimage as part of our biblical mandate and our historical tradition, the question is obvious: Why don’t we live as if we are on a pilgrimage?”¹⁰⁹ Rather than presenting this to our

¹⁰⁶ William Countryman, *Biblical Authority or Biblical Tyranny: Scripture and the Christian Pilgrimage* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 74.

¹⁰⁷ Isaiah 43:19 (RSV).

¹⁰⁸ Webb-Mitchell, *School of the Pilgrim*, 149.

¹⁰⁹ Webb-Mitchell, *School of the Pilgrim*, 151.

churches as something new to give a try, we can instead remind ourselves that this is who we are called to be. Webb-Mitchell maintains, “The call for the church as the body of Christ is to be a pilgrimage people. The journey began before we came into existence, but we are now part of it, committed to a progression from the limitations of the self into the limitless life of God.”¹¹⁰

Father Thomas Rosica also offers pilgrimage as a forgotten spiritual tool to the stuck-in-a-rut church: “Pilgrimage offers us a spiritual practice which demands from the outset that we break that idolatrous relationship with church-as-usual and admit that the experience of God can be so much more than the totality of what one can experience at home. At its heart pilgrimage demands a desire for change and a commitment to go out of one’s self and away from the routine of one’s habits in order to set out towards the horizon indicated by the Lord, as Abraham did ...”¹¹¹ If we are serious about our desire for change, we need to be able to literally and figuratively walk away from our old selves in their old setting.

As Diana Butler Bass reminds us, to be a Christian should be more than being part of a fixed and static community in a fixed location. “If we think of belonging only as membership in a club, organization, or church, we miss the point. Belonging is the risk to move beyond the world we know, to venture out on pilgrimage, to accept exile.”¹¹² We have made the mistake of believing that we have ARRIVED at our final spiritual destination; we must alter our perceptions of what sacred sites are, and what it means to go up to be near to God. While it is still important that we *go up* in the sense that we go *out* beyond our personal comfort zones—we must acknowledge that our weekly going *up* to our own temple isn’t giving us the spiritual benefit of making the effort of going up to Jerusalem, the Holy Land, or even a neighboring shrine. We

¹¹⁰ Webb-Mitchell, *School of the Pilgrim*, 94.

¹¹¹ Rosica, *Biblical, Theological & Ecclesiological Foundations*.

¹¹² Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion*, 198.

should probably actually go *down* or *out* more often and meet God in various places such as the streets, bars, and parks.

It is true that shrines will remain important destinations for seekers and saints alike, and it would be reckless to remove *all* of our older sanctuaries, leaving behind no shrines for future generations. I must say, however, that we in local mainline Protestant congregations have made the mistake of allowing our sanctuaries to become our own personal shrines. I fear that far too many of our congregations have already come to think of their buildings as shrines, and themselves as primarily keepers of the shrine. We are disappointed that fewer and fewer people make the pilgrimage up our front steps (up to the high places), and yet, in truth, we must acknowledge that our building does not merit shrine status in the eyes of our neighbors, only in ours.

In his 2011 book, *Traveling*, theologian, author, and activist Joerg Rieger makes this observation: “An understanding that God is at work not just in particular religious communities but also in the world could make a tremendous difference in our churches. It would break open narcissism that so often keeps us tied not only to our church buildings but also to our own ideas and our own ways of life. The church that feels that the basic task of its outreach is to take a God who is primarily housed in its sanctuary out into the world not only repeats old colonial patterns but will never be able to learn what God is doing elsewhere.”¹¹³ We have heard the criticisms from the *nones* (those who would mark *none* on any form asking for religious affiliation) that we church-folk are out of touch with the real world and been told that far more spiritual experiences are available outside of our sanctuary walls than they find inside. We should probably go outside and see for ourselves.

¹¹³ Joerg Rieger, *Traveling* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, 2011), 34.

It is important to note that what I am recommending here is a communal pilgrimage experience and not a solo trip; the more congregants who participate, the better. This isn't an exercise just for leadership or a ministry team; it is one that must be shared by the whole body to free up that whole body. It may be edifying for any one person, family, or small group to have a wilderness experience, a pilgrimage to a distant sacred site, or to sojourn among another faith community during a week off from their regular church routine. While that will surely be personally restful, regenerative and perhaps transformational, that solo or small-group experience will not be transformative for the whole church. Brett Webb-Mitchell writes that the church needs to take a hike, *en masse*:

When a community goes on pilgrimage both the individual persons and the community will grow. While an individual or a couple may focus on the ways that they come to know their lives in a deeper, more meaningful way through the practice of pilgrimage, likewise the community, the body of believers, not only comes to know themselves individually or personally in a deeper and more profound way, but their relationship to and with God is made richer ... The community will draw out of this experience a sense that the God of Israel, who moved with the people in the ark of the covenant, who walked among the people of Galilee and Jerusalem, is still present with us, in the form or shape of the Spirit who accompanies us on this communal pilgrimage.¹¹⁴

Just as individual pilgrims have always decided to separate themselves from their habitual status quo surroundings and avail themselves of the transformative process of *going* and experiencing God in other venues, churches must also communally make a decision for themselves to leave behind business as usual and risk that scary "something different" that lies somewhere *out there*.

For those who will voluntarily choose to take such a spiritual journey, there is something of a six-part process that will be followed. If we add to Turner and Turner's three-stage process a

¹¹⁴ Webb-Mitchell, *School of the Pilgrim*, 65.

Christian understanding of God as initiator, extending a *call* upon the people, a resulting hearing and acceptance of the call from God by the people, and a similar communal covenant or commitment to take action upon the call, we then have:

- (i) a prophetic statement of God's call upon the people to go
- (ii) a communal sensing/hearing/acknowledgment of the call to go
- (iii) a communal acceptance/commitment to go
- (iv) the actual first step (going)
- (v) the journey itself (being gone), and finally
- (vi) a return or arrival where the people discern and live into the differences the entire process has made within them.

Of course, it is not enough to hear the call and then take no action—this merely cements the hearer even deeper into the ways of old, possibly never to escape. Simply *saying* we will take some daring action is not the same as making a *commitment* to it. As Webb-Mitchell notes, perhaps the most important piece of the entire process is the *decision* to go.¹¹⁵ That decision, in and of itself, signifies that the person/group wants change enough to actually do something about it. It will require a corporate commitment to actually step across the threshold into a liminal space.

Such a commitment can't simply be a matter of taking a vote in a board meeting, or even of getting everyone to nod or say Amen during a sermon. This can be shown to have been mere lip service when the time to actually set foot out the door comes and everyone remains planted in their pews (or at home on their couches). For a church body, a shared, public commitment to God and to one another is an important part of what is needed to actually take that brave first step together. There must be some version of looking one another in the eye and saying, "Let's do this!" We must make a *covenant* to take this step.

¹¹⁵ Webb-Mitchell, *School of the Pilgrim*, 25.

Once that first step is taken, by the mere act of crossing the threshold, a pilgrimage journey begins to work a change within the pilgrims. This important first step serves to sever the ties of the dreaded *way we've always done things*. David Carrasco, Professor of History of Religions at Princeton University, promises in *Those Who Go On A Sacred Journey: The Shape and Diversity of Pilgrimages* that once the journey has begun and the traveler begins to grapple with the strange new people, settings, struggles and God throughout it all, it becomes impossible to return home unchanged in any way. God will have been ever leading through experiences of something new. He writes, "In general, people who undertake a pilgrimage decide to separate themselves from the social and spiritual status quo ... Whether the separation from home, social status and daily routine is voluntary or obligatory, a break with both social and spiritual status quo is necessary ... the pilgrimage begins by one being set apart ... This allows the pilgrim eventually to return home and face the routines and rigours of life with a new sense of purpose and hope."¹¹⁶ And so, as Sean Freyne assures in *Jesus the Pilgrim*, "the return could never mean just going back to the mundane as it was before."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ David Carrasco, "Those Who Go On A Sacred Journey: The Shape and Diversity of Pilgrimages" in *Pilgrimage*, eds. Virgil Elizondo and Sean Freyne (London: SCM Press, 1996), 15–17.

¹¹⁷ Freyne, *Jesus the Pilgrim*, 33.

Chapter Three

Let's Take A Hike!

“Prepare your work outside; get everything ready for yourself in the field,
and after that build your house.”¹¹⁸

(Of the re-current pattern that has produced the Great Emergence) “There is considerable benefit to all of us in exposing the presence of that pattern to public view. For one thing, seeing it allows those of us who are living through the current upheaval to more accurately evaluate and more wisely address the changes that seem at times to almost be swamping our ship. For another—and this often feels more important on a personal level—discovering and exposing pattern can greatly diminish our sense, either corporately or individually, that somehow, ‘This mess must be our/my fault. It must be because of something we/I did somewhere back along the way’ ... there is no better way to shed the weight of it than by looking with clear eyes and informed minds at what has got us to this place.”¹¹⁹

This project represents qualitative research and in particular a case study. The conceptual model was derived primarily from the work of Turner and Turner. Their work allows us to conceptualize new liminal space into which a congregation is invited to commit to its pilgrimage from its current habitual worship space orientation to imagining, realizing and embracing new alternatives for ministry. This project makes the case that the ancient practices of Pilgrimage, Wandering and Sojourning can help congregations that need to transition from historic and treasured spaces to new ventures in ministry. The case study was designed as a six-part liminal journey rooted in these ancient practices taken by one congregation, First Christian Church of Whittier, California (FCCW).

Keeping Turner & Turner’s Processual Form of Ritual and the three phases: *separation*, *limen*, and *reaggregation* in mind, I presented church leaders with a proposed six-stage process of:

¹¹⁸ Proverbs 24:27 (RSV).

¹¹⁹ Tickle, *The Great Emergence*, 41–42.

- A Mini-retreat, baby-steps away from our campus, to extend the prophetic invitation and to hear God's call to GO.
- A Founder's Day celebration in which the past might be celebrated, but also then *set aside* in favor of acknowledging, answering, and making a pilgrim's commitment to God's call to journey beyond the past and into an unknown future, and experiencing the freedom of separation from the status-quo as we literally step across the threshold for a three-stage liminal journey to follow.
- A Pilgrimage Journey to a shrine-like re-creation of the congregation's origin story: our own Genesis in the unfinished classrooms of a nineteenth-century schoolhouse where we would have a chance to remember how sparse and yet how full of promise that setting had been.
- A Wandering Wilderness Journey into a park, where we might put up our own traveling Tabernacle Tent and trust ourselves to God's direction and guidance.
- A Sojourning Journey across the river and into the Land of Promises, to dwell briefly among a Missional Church People and their unfamiliar customs.
- A Rededication Sunday returning and taking part in a ceremony of reaggregation.

Speaking the Prophetic Call to *Go*: Setting the stage for Separation, Liminality, and Reaggregation

“Therefore, son of man, prepare for yourself an exile's baggage...”¹²⁰

In advance of the actual project, a fair amount of work had to be done to get congregational buy-in and approval. In particular with a Disciples of Christ congregation and our bottom-up leadership structure, it is never enough to say, “the pastor thinks it would be a good idea to move forward with a project.” As with any congregation comprised of a large percentage

¹²⁰ Ezekiel 12:3 (RSV).

of seniors, change was not welcome, and especially change regarding such issues as the when and where of worship. Unless the ceiling had fallen in, as had happened in the 1987 Whittier Earthquake, worship happened in the sanctuary at 10:45 on Sunday morning in the main Sanctuary. Period. To convince church leadership that it would do us good to worship elsewhere for a period would require some real persuasion. As one Church Board member (who was personally *for* the proposal) put it to me, “You’d better have a real good sales-pitch.”

In preparation for this experience, a mini-retreat was held off-campus at a renovated historic train depot just down the street in Whittier. It wasn’t far, but it was a step away. Not wishing to preclude senior saints unwilling or unable to travel to a more remote retreat center and yet still wanting to be free of the bounds of our church campus, we stayed close to home and yet intentionally met in a repurposed historic building where we could see concretely (pun intended) an example of an old structure simultaneously being honored and preserved for what it *had been* and repurposed for a new community use. While all seventy-two active congregants were invited, twenty-five chose/were able to attend. On the Friday night before the Saturday retreat we met in a banquet room of a local restaurant for dinner, and at everyone’s place was a quote about change. People were encouraged to talk about their particular quote and what it spoke to them/us.

After dinner, I handed out scripture verses Joshua 1:1–4 and asked everyone to read them before going to bed and to see if they informed our dreams in any way. We would share with one another in the morning when we met at the depot for the one-day retreat.

On Saturday morning, at the depot, after breakfast goodies were shared, the day began. While no one was able to remember any dreams informed by the scripture passage, some reported that they had thought about it. Among the ideas shared are the following:

- “After the death of Moses”¹²¹—New beginnings are prompted by the death of former things.
- “go over this Jordan”¹²²—What are the barriers that we see/fear that God would have us cross?
- “every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you”¹²³—The entire world is available to us as God’s gift and as our mission field.
- “all the land of the Hittites”¹²⁴—Who are the Hittites who are out there—do we know them? Do we speak their language? Are we afraid of them?

During our retreat, there were presentations by several congregational leaders. The first presentation entitled “How we got here” was designed to convey the reality of our current context. Attendees were reminded of the conclusions and recommendations from a recently completed Hope Partnership *New Beginnings* report, and the discernment process that had followed. The numbers and trends were clear; we were in an increasingly steep numeric decline and the average age increase that had begun in the early 70s had picked up speed in every decade since. The report had reminded us that to do nothing (make no changes to the current ministry model) was in fact to make a decision, and that decision would be to continue to diminish in size, resources, and community influence. We might be able to move an end-date further down the road by taking on additional tenants and by continuing to defer major maintenance expenses, but eventually if no significant changes were made to our model of ministry, the declining line of membership and resulting financial and volunteer resources would intersect with the rising line of the financial and volunteer needs of managing our beautiful and cherished 1920s-era

¹²¹ Joshua 1:1 (NRSV).

¹²² Joshua 1:1 (NRSV).

¹²³ Joshua 1:3 (NRSV).

¹²⁴ Joshua 1:4 (NRSV).

sanctuary building. To make no changes was to guarantee losing the campus not on our own terms, but through neglect, decay, and financial necessity.

The congregation's consensus opinions from the New Beginnings discussions are presented in Appendix A and summarized below:

1. We were not interested in/open to making any major changes to our worship service in order to be more appealing to a younger/different demographic.
2. We knew that we had become too self-focused; if we were to pack up and disappear tomorrow there would be very little impact on our community.
3. While we were not ready to leave, we admitted that we needed to find *some* way to serve our neighbors in a meaningful way.
4. While we were no longer young, no longer many, no longer strong, and no longer deep-pocketed—we were *space-rich*. We could share The Whole Place (a term coined for both our entire campus and the community of groups that shared it) with our neighbors.

We admitted that, sadly, we did not have the energy or vision to create and manage something new on our own, but perhaps we could meet and partner with God in the new things our neighbors had already envisioned. While we were still at the corner of Greenleaf Avenue and Hadley Street, *something* could happen that our neighbors might miss if we weren't there. And *if* we found a way to share these new experiences with our neighbors, there *might* be an opportunity for service and outreach that we could handle. We admitted that we were too tired to go out into the community to serve, but maybe we could meet our neighbors and serve them in our own buildings. By announcing “The Whole Place is Yours,” and asking, “What might happen here?,” we were simultaneously admitting that the buildings were never really *ours*, they

had always been meant to glorify God and serve Christ by serving *others*, and that God could be experienced, served, and shared in many ways besides the Sunday School/Church Store model.

A financial report gave us all a very clear picture of our current state. After some real belt-tightening and the addition of a major tenant in one of the education buildings, we were operating with a balanced budget for the first time in many years. By virtue of rental income and interest on investments we were no longer in the red but were not hugely in the black.

We could pay our bills and be prepared for at least some of the deferred maintenance issues that would arise with our aging buildings. If two or three unplanned major maintenance issues were to crash upon us at once, we'd likely be forced to liquidate the property. In the meantime, we were the stewards of three buildings and had enough money to keep them safe and functional. We didn't have a lot of staff time that we could dedicate to new programming—if anything new were to be taken on we would need it to be volunteer led and maintained by community members outside the church. If Whole Place partners wanted renovations and upgrades to happen, except for very basic safety and code-compliance issues, those upgrades would need to be in-kind contributions made to benefit the Whole Place community. They would not be for the enjoyment of the church community. To be good stewards meant that we would still pay our own way.

A presentation then was shared that painted a picture of current, planned, and dreamed of Whole Place programs and partners. The congregants heard of renovations that were currently underway to reclaim Education Building upper-level classrooms that had been shuttered in the early 70s. Sweat equity and financial donations from non-church member partners had made possible the cleaning of decades of dust and grime, patching and painting of walls, re-installation of fallen ceiling tiles, and the relocation of piles of *stuff* that had been stored over the years.

I then presented my proposal for a five-week series of worship services.

Week One: Founder's Day celebration

(See Appendix B)

In order to really let go of a former vision or goal we must officially declare it *over*. In celebrating the 120-year work of the congregation we could simultaneously give proper credit and thanks to our predecessor saints and declare *their* work successfully finished. Closing that chapter would allow us to take up new work and claim a new vision of how we might serve God and Christ. It was my very clear aim of this worship service to say to ourselves, and others (again and again): That was then, this is now. We would walk out the doors committed to making a journey together. We would listen for God's voice beyond the bounds of our habitual worship context.

Week Two: Genesis Pilgrimage

(See Appendix C)

To help remind or connect us with the larger, longer narrative that we are part of, beyond our stay at the corner of Greenleaf and Hadley, we would go back and experience a more stripped-down worship experience in a setting very like our congregation's earliest days in a bare schoolroom. Hopefully, we would remind ourselves how little we needed in the way of furnishings and trappings for a meaningful worship experience.

Week Three: Wilderness Wandering

Pitching our tent outside to worship in a local park would help us remember that God is not confined to human-made sanctuaries, and that God waits for us to discover, interact with, and give thanks to God in and through *all* of creation. We would be reminded that God does not require Temples; they are tools that *we* believe to be necessary for proper worship.

Week Four: Land of Promises Sojourn

(See Appendix D)

Journeying to far-off and exotic Pomona would allow us to catch a glimpse of a *New Thing* God was already doing on an old church campus. Urban Mission, intentionally begun as a Mission First church start, would help us to see firsthand one of the *new* ways that congregations are attempting to walk in Christ's footsteps (a glimpse over Jordan into the Land of Promises). We would sojourn among the Urban Mission congregation as we worshipped together and share a community meal that would include the neighbors considered part of their parish.

Week Five: Return to the Same Old New Place

(See Appendix E)

Upon our return to FCCW we would experience our sanctuary and campus with new eyes. With insights gained abroad, we would re-enter a very familiar place that would also be unfamiliar. Returning as changed individuals and church body, we would be met with physical changes designed by a Transformation Team that would greet us and show us how small changes can create a more welcoming and multi-purposed environment intended to share the resource of our buildings with our neighbors. We would re-dedicate ourselves and our campus to serve others. We would have the opportunity to ponder with Fr. James Mallon when he writes, "The question of how the marginalized feel when entering our churches is one that haunts me. How welcome does a person feel who does not look like us, sound like us, dress like us and smell like us?"¹²⁵

I then spent a little time giving an example of how the longer we are part of a church community the larger our blind spots can become and that "one of the best ways to get a quick reading is to ask visitors what they felt, sensed, or experienced the first time they came to the

¹²⁵ James Mallon, *Divine Renovation: Bringing your Parish from Maintenance to Mission* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2014), 104.

church property.”¹²⁶ I recounted the story that Tino and Val had shared with me regarding their first visit. They were two of our newest members, middle-aged Hispanics, and not the usual demographic of FCCW. (The story of Tino and Val is presented in Appendix F.) As welcoming as we thought we were, there was obviously work that we could do to our building (and ourselves) to make people feel welcome before we ever said a word of greeting. As Philip Sheldrake puts it, “Hospitality is always a blending of inside and outside. In other words, hospitality creates a ‘between’ place. This is where the other is encountered and social difference is transcended.”¹²⁷

I asked if we could go on a little trip, hoping to discover some new things about ourselves and listen for God’s voice *out there*. Could we make a few changes to the place while we were gone? I asked the congregation to draw inspiration from the words of Richard Rohr: “You do not think yourself into a new way of living, you live yourself into a new way of thinking.”¹²⁸

Permission was granted, unanimously, albeit begrudgingly in one case, where the member said, “I volunteer to be the one who stays behind to greet people at the door and tell them where you all are.”

Founder’s Day: Closing a Chapter and turning a page.

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:
a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,
a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,
a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance”¹²⁹

“We need rearview mirrors; we dare not forget the things that have shaped and nurtured our lives. But as followers of a risen Lord, the most important things are always on the road ahead of us. It’s always out there, on the road to the future that we will find him.”¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Harnish, *You Only Have To Die*, 27.

¹²⁷ Sheldrake, *Spaces For The Sacred*, 114.

¹²⁸ Rohr, *Eager to Love*, 201.

¹²⁹ Ecclesiastes 3:1–4 (RSV).

¹³⁰ Harnish, *You Only Have To Die*, 37.

And so, after several subsequent months of planning and preparation, we held a 120-year anniversary Founder's Day celebration. The Order of Worship is presented in Appendix B. Former members and former pastors were invited to attend a special worship service followed by a luncheon.

Welcoming remarks included the reminder that the congregation's roots traced back through three different meeting locations before our current home. We may have forgotten it, but *change* was actually a big part of our DNA.

Worship began with the hymn "Rise Up, O Saints of God!" and its call to "have done with lesser things."¹³¹ A responsive Call to Worship (See Appendix B2) gave thanks for the countless saints who had done the work of the church for so long, including "those who have been cheerful ambassadors in the wider community beyond these walls."¹³² An Opening Prayer (See Appendix B3) included the petition that we might "hear the call of the gospel in the human needs that surround us and that we grow in courage and walk boldly in faith that our actions might reflect the love we profess."¹³³

Scripture from Hebrews 11:1–39 was read, beginning with the assertion that "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen,"¹³⁴ and then recounting the long list of forefathers and mothers in the faith who had each stepped out and done a new thing in answer to God's call and setting the stage for successive generations "as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore,"¹³⁵ concluding with the writer's

¹³¹ William P. Merrill, words and William H. Walter, music, *Chalice Hymnal*, ed. Daniel B. Merrick (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1995), Hymn 611.

¹³² Colbert S. Cartwright and O.I. Cricket Harrison, eds., *Chalice Worship* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1997), 192–93.

¹³³ *Chalice Worship*, 193.

¹³⁴ Hebrews 11:1 (NRSV).

¹³⁵ Hebrews 11:12 (NRSV).

point that “all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”¹³⁶

I gave a sermon (See Appendix B6) drawing parallels between the list of our spiritual forefathers (and mothers) and their work advancing God’s plans and our own more recent congregational forefathers and mothers who had been called to specific tasks in ministry that had led us to our current place in the story of God’s people across the ages. Just as God’s entire work for the faithful had not been completed by any one individual or generation in the past, always leaving some new task to be accomplished by those following, the work of our church was not completed even in its glory days of high attendance. It was the work of our parents and grandparents to build Sunday School rooms to accommodate the great influx of their day; it is not our work to replicate their efforts.

Hymns and prayers followed, including a closing Responsive Prayer (See Appendix 10) that concluded:

L/ Help us to resist the temptation to look back over our shoulder as if our way is there;
P/ burn as a pillar of fire before us; leading us beyond limited horizons to lands you alone can see.
L/ God who goes before us and extends us fresh promises with each new day; take us on a pilgrimage from this place and out into the wider world,
P/ that we might meet you there and join you in the work of thy will being done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Just before walking out the door, before we stepped into liminality, we sang verse three of “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah” as a Closing Response: “When I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside; Bear me through the swelling current; land me safe on Canaan’s side; Songs of praises, songs of praises, I will ever give to thee, I will ever give to thee.”¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Hebrews 11:39–40 (NRSV).

¹³⁷ William Williams, words and John Hughes, music, “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah,” *Chalice Hymnal*, Hymn 622.

Following the service, the congregation and our guests met in the fellowship hall for a meal. In preparation for the day, displays were made of photos and other memorabilia pertaining to the church and its long and vibrant history, including a VHS video that had been prepared twenty years previously for the 100-year celebration. All in attendance were invited to go on the road with us as we met next week in the out and away.

Genesis Pilgrimage: Remembering the Story

“Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story—
those he redeemed from the hand of the foe.”¹³⁸

“Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land.
Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your ancestors?
Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children,
and their children to the next generation.”¹³⁹

“To retrace the steps of one’s own making is to remark one’s own marks,
and thus to find one’s way.”¹⁴⁰

The following Sunday morning the congregation met a few blocks away in the auditorium of a 1915-era elementary schoolhouse that is now home to Whittier City School District offices. FCCW began and was founded in the as-yet unfinished classrooms of the Bailey Street School in 1895, and met there for nearly two full years before renting rooms in another building. We met in the 1915 building in an attempt to remind ourselves of how little our founders needed in the way of church *building* to be *church*. The setting also linked us to that part of our story that predated the glory years of the 50s. This pilgrimage to a shrine recreation wasn’t dependent so much on the exact replication of the original site as it was on the intention to remember what had happened there.

¹³⁸ Psalm 107:2 (RSV).

¹³⁹ Joel 1:2–3 (RSV).

¹⁴⁰ Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back Into Place: Toward A Renewed Understanding Of The Place-World*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 26.

The auditorium had been restored to much of its original state—bead board walls and a bare stage—but now with moveable conference chairs rather than auditorium seats. Congregants arrived to a sparse and airy auditorium with fifty chairs arranged in four semi-circular rows around a blank chalkboard and a small, low table holding a wineskin and a loaf of bread. Questions and concerns were often voiced immediately upon arrival: We don't have a bulletin? We don't have hymnals? Does it matter where we sit? How far away are the restrooms? Will people know how to find us? How are we going to serve communion without the serving set? I assured them that these various things would be talked about and discovered in due time as the service progressed. We'll all find out when we get there.

The service formally began as the congregants were asked to answer the question, "What do we hope happens here today?" Responses were written on the chalkboard as a Call to Worship, and they were included in the opening prayer. (See appendix C)

Oh God, we hope:

Everyone can find us here.
We have everything we need.
God will show us something new.
We will still be church.
This will be worth coming.
We forget that building.
We remember how nice that building is.
We remember we still have each other.
This will be fun and new.
Something different will happen to us here. Amen.

An *a cappella* call/response version of the spiritual *I'm So Glad Jesus Lifted Me* was sung. "Look at that, we brought hymns with us even without a hymnal," I remarked, and then asked everyone to think about two questions: "What did we leave behind?" and "What did we bring with us?" The resulting litany of things we had left behind and things that we still had with

us were recorded on two sides of the chalkboard. Things that we left behind came easily and quickly:

- the organ, the stained glass windows, hymnals, the beautiful building (Our property chair quickly chimed in that we left behind a lot of headaches and costs and someone else noted we left behind all those stairs and that long, steep ramp too!)
- the pews (Good riddance, these chairs are much more comfortable and easy to move as needed!)
- the communion set (But look, we have wine and bread!)
- the historic location where people knew to find us (Pat is there in the narthex ready to direct or bring anyone over here.)
- it just doesn't feel as HOLY as it does in the sanctuary. We don't have the same sacred atmosphere. (But this room is so *open* and *airy*!)

The list of what we still had with us came more slowly and sparsely. We still had each other, God, love, our shared history, the Pastor, and our little choir who came with us. It was noted that we do have communion elements—just not the same ones we're used to. And, I *like* not having the pews, this is so much more intimate, and I can see everyone's faces! It's less formal this way. (To which someone added, I don't like it less formal!) All of the items listed on the chalkboard were lifted in a Joy and Concerns prayer.

The story of our founding in the Old Bailey Street School was again recounted, and we looked around the room to see if we had at our disposal about what they would have had then. Our oldest saints confirmed, Yes, this is what it would have been like! Except, of course, the lighting is better and there would have been *no* air-conditioning!

There was discussion as I asked, "Could *we* hold church *here*?" Comments included:

Where would the Sunday School Classes meet? (Back in the day we were OK sitting in the far corners of a room like this for individual classes.)

We're paying \$500 for the room for three hours; we could pay only \$2,000 per month and give up all the headaches of owning a building!

Sooner or later we'd at least need a piano! (Eric, our organist/choir director, could bring his electric keyboard.) That's not like the organ!

Who would want to join a church that met here? (How many people want to join us now, in that big old building?)

Where would the Pastor's office be? (The Pastor used to have his office at *home*! LOTS of things used to happen in people's homes.)

Eventually, the overall consensus seemed to be that yes, perhaps reluctantly, we *could* still be and do church in a room like this—just as our founders had for several years.

The choir gathered and sang an *a cappella* anthem (with a pitch pipe to tune), which was warmly received. It was expressed that, It's not the same as having the organ, but it was very intimate and personal to have them sing right here with us instead of from the choir loft.

It was time for a scripture reading and a sermon, but we had no Bible! This caused a bit of consternation. ("There are no prepared lay leader materials. There isn't even a copy of a Bible verse to read!") I asked, "Did anyone *bring* a Bible?" (Awkward silence followed; we are *not* Bible carriers, we count on the Pew Bibles being there each Sunday. If a Bible was to have been brought, the *paid Christian* Pastor should have brought it.) One deacon, Michael, finally proudly spoke up, "I brought MY Bible!" I thanked him and then asked him, *for today*, to pretend he *hadn't* brought it; let's say that we came without a Bible, and see if we can still have church. (Much skepticism and disapproval was expressed.)

The Passing of the Peace was shared, helping to temporarily dissipate concern about our lack of Holy Scripture (and our Pastor's foolish refusal of the one copy we had.)

Once everyone was seated again I asked, "So, what do you think we should do about not having a Bible?" A time of problem solving ensued—I can run back to the church and get some from the pews; I can run home and get one, I live really close. (Also, I don't understand why we can't just read from Michael's bible?)

I said, "But we could really get by without it, we know the *story*." (A few of the senior saints smiled and nodded.) "Think about it, we know the story. We couldn't quote chapter and verse, we couldn't recite verbatim, we'd probably forget the book of Numbers and Ruth and a lot of the Proverbs ... but we know THE STORY. Right?" (Hmmm ... folks were not convinced, not convicted.)

I asked, "What part of the story could you tell right now?" (No responses; skeptical glances.) "Remember, you don't have to quote the Bible—just tell the STORY. Could someone tell the story of Jesus' birth?" (Several hands shot up.) "Could we tell the story of Jesus picking the fishermen?" (Many more nods ... Oh, yeah, I could tell that...)

I continued: "Do we know the creation story? Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel? Could we tell the stories of Noah's Ark, the tower of Babel, Jesus and the little children, the healing of the ten lepers, the woman at the well, the woman and the two coins, prodigal son, the Good Samaritan, the upper room and Gethsemane, the betrayal, trial and crucifixion ... we could tell the resurrection story, couldn't we? Pentecost Sunday? Paul writing from prison? We brought THE STORY with us even without our Bibles, didn't we?" (Nods of agreement) "We need to remember that."

I asked, “And what about *our* part of the story; can we tell *that*?” (Hmm ... skeptical looks again.) “The world today is telling us that it’s not much interested in hearing ‘the old, old, story’ unless we’re willing to share how it has shaped *our* story and continues to shape it. The world is waiting for us to tell them a Gospel Story that only we can tell: *our* Gospel story. Remember, we haven’t simply been handed a finished product that we are meant to preserve. We were invited to join a *movement* with a central story that is still being written. If we try to freeze the story at a certain place or time, it becomes just another story. If we left that Big Blue Box (my nickname for our sanctuary building) someday *for good*, our story would not end; another chapter would merely begin.” (Much nodding and smiling, which is high praise from this crowd!)

An offering was collected (in a basket, not our silver offering plates) while another call/response spiritual, “I’ve Got Peace Like a River,” was sung. An elder offered a wonderfully extemporaneous, heartfelt prayer for the offering. It was time for communion, the centerpiece of Disciple worship.

I asked, “Do we remember the teaching about new wine and an old wineskin?” (Yes! If you try to put new wine in an old wineskin it will burst.) “And why is that?” (New wine is still *alive* and active and needs room to grow.)

We shared communion this week with literal new wine from a literal new wineskin as a reminder that the communion in this movement that we’ve joined isn’t always about Welch’s Grape Juice from a silver chalice.

Phillip Sheldrake reminds us that “a most important element in place as a human construct is memory, or, more precisely, multiple memories. Eucharistic place is very much a

landscape of memory.”¹⁴¹ This communion celebration, away from the time-honored, ritualized and iconic pattern that the congregation so rarely strayed from back home was an important part of our liminal experience. Away from the presentation-oriented sanctuary, away from the ordered and confining pews, and away from the liturgical structures and central-aisle processing and recessing—we had a chance for a more intimate and organically presented and served family meal.

While everyone sang the spiritual “Let Us Break Bread Together,” two deacons came forward and rather awkwardly prepared and served the communion meal. Preparation wasn’t hidden away in a sacristy; the wine wasn’t measured from a dispenser but rather from a wineskin. Spills were visible to everyone gathered around the table. The loaf of bread was not pre-torn, it was a struggle to rip open. An elder offered a simple blessing for the loaf and cup, and communion was shared. The wine was universally deemed awful. Non-alcoholic Merlot, screw top, vintage 2014, it was truly *new wine* and was a far cry from the sweet Welch’s Grape Juice that the congregation had shared for nearly a century.

“Amazing Grace” was sung, with its reminder that *grace will lead me home*.¹⁴² A benediction was pronounced, and the congregation was dismissed with a reminder that *next week* we would meet outside in the park next door.

Wilderness Wandering: Pitching Our Tabernacle

“So I took them out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness.”¹⁴³

“Then the Tent of Meeting is to travel with the camp of the descendants of Levi in the middle of the camps.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Sheldrake, *Spaces For The Sacred*, 80.

¹⁴² John Newton, words and music, “Amazing Grace,” *Chalice Hymnal*, Hymn 546.

¹⁴³ Ezekiel 20:10 (RSV).

¹⁴⁴ Numbers 2:17 (RSV).

“To walk into wild places is to walk away from cultivated ones,
but the “away” retains elements of that from which it proceeds ...
Conversely, if there is a return trip, the wilderness
will be incorporated into the cultural world one rejoins.”¹⁴⁵

Thankfully, it did not rain. It was a glorious fall morning when we all met in the small park that had once been the playground next to the old schoolhouse we had met in the week prior. *Had* it rained, we would have met again in the schoolhouse auditorium. While it would have been wonderful to meet several hours away in a true desert setting, allowances for senior saints including handicap parking, accessible walkways, and nearby restrooms made this park an acceptable wilderness setting where we pitched our tabernacle, a large pop-up tent, alongside a giant elm that spread its shade on both sides of the sidewalk leading into the park from the parking lot. Maybe Moses and the tribes never had it so good, but this was roughing it for us.

Our worship space was set up in the round, with arcs of folding chairs on either side of the sidewalk. A low table once again held the wineskin and a loaf of bread (Overheard: Ugh, we’re having new wine again!), a small wooden cross, a candle in a hurricane lamp, and a Bible. (Wow, he’s letting us use a Bible this week.) Tucked into a niche between the tree-trunk, the table, and the chairs was a blanket with pillows and Sunday school crafts for the children.

We began with a responsive reading; still no bulletin but a one-sheet handout:

L: Come along with me on a pilgrimage of faith.

P: Bring along a sense of expectancy, a vision of high hopes, a glimpse of future possibility, a vivid imagination.

L: For God’s creation is not done.

P: We are called to pioneer a future yet unnamed.

L: As we venture forward, we leave behind our desires for

P: a no-risk life, worldly accumulations, certainty.

L: Let us travel light in the spirit of faith and expectation,

P: toward the God of our hopes and dreams.

L: May we be witnesses to God’s future breaking in.

¹⁴⁵ Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, 250.

P: Come along with me as sojourners in faith secure in the knowledge that we never travel alone.¹⁴⁶

I again asked the question, “What do we hope happens here today?” The responses were not recorded on a chalkboard, but they were gathered up into a prayer of Joys and Concerns. We hoped for visitors, for no mean dogs, for no wind, for a sense of God’s presence, for an appreciation of the beauty around us.

Another *a cappella* hymn followed, and then people were asked to share, “What are the *benefits* of being out here in a tent?” and “What are the *drawbacks* of meeting like this?”

The drawbacks came flooding out fast and furious:

- What if it had rained, what about when it storms, what about when the Santa Ana winds blow, what about when it gets really hot, or cold?
- Once you get off the sidewalk it’s hard for people with walkers to get around.
- It’s distracting to see other people in the park; it makes me self-conscious.
- It seems kind of rude to make people watch us worshipping out in public like this.
- What would we do if someone walked down the sidewalk and right through the middle of everything?
- The folding chairs are uncomfortable, and the ground isn’t always even.
- The bathrooms are a long ways away.
- It would be a lot of work setting the chairs and the tent up every week.
- The homeless could just wander right in.

I asked, “But are there *any* benefits?”

Yes, there were:

- It’s a gorgeous day; it would be a shame to be indoors.

¹⁴⁶ *Chalice Worship*, Prayer 95, 255.

- I like laying on the blanket! (One of the kids.)
- I think it's *good* that people can see us.
- There's something good about having to make the effort, not having everything so smooth and symmetrical and easy. I think we get too lazy.
- I like feeling the sun and the breeze.
- I like that we're all gathered together like this, it feels like a family.
- This tree really feels like a cathedral that God made.
- We aren't paying to run the air-conditioning.
- There's nothing between us and the rest of the world.

Several scripture verses were then read aloud:

Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; what is the house which you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? All these things my hand has made, and so all these things are mine," says the LORD.¹⁴⁷

"Am I a God at hand," says the LORD, "and not a God afar off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him?" says the LORD. "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" says the LORD.¹⁴⁸

For a tent was prepared, the outer one in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the Holy Place.¹⁴⁹

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man.¹⁵⁰

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?¹⁵¹

I gave a brief reflection on our ability (and responsibility) to worship God everywhere and not to save it for special times or places. Everyone was asked to remember that God is found

¹⁴⁷ Isaiah 66:1 (RSV).

¹⁴⁸ Jeremiah 23:23–24 (RSV).

¹⁴⁹ Hebrews 9:2 (RSV).

¹⁵⁰ Acts 17:24 (RSV).

¹⁵¹ 1 Corinthians 3:16 (RSV).

in the unplanned moments and places in the world. We have become idolatrous in our insistence on worshipping in our sanctuary, forgetting that God is ready to meet us in worship in *all* of creation. We need to occasionally have wilderness experiences where we don't have everything laid out just the way we like it, and we meet God in God's own sanctuary.

As part of the offering, everyone was encouraged to take five minutes and to experience the park through the four senses of sight, smell, hearing, and touch (we refrained from *tasting* anything), and to come back ready to share with each other and to give God thanks for what we had experienced. Leaves, blossoms, tree-bark, a bird feather, a twig, an acorn were all brought back and placed on the table alongside gifts of money. We shared our discoveries of sounds of birdsong, children playing, dogs barking, wind in the branches. We had seen birds, butterflies, clouds, ants, and other people. We felt the grass, the tree, the breeze, and the sun. We smelled grass, flowers, and someone's barbeque. In addition to our offering of money, we offered these delights back to God who had given them to us in the first place. We gave thanks for the opportunity to share them with one another and with God. In his book, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World: A Theology for the Third Millennium*, Franciscan Kenan B. Osborne reminds us that "God's creative action may be in every cloud and tree and river, but the sacramentality aspect takes place only when this action produces a subsequent reaction from some human person."¹⁵²

Communion was once again prepared, no more smoothly than last week, but everyone seemed much less anxious about the informality of it all. The new wine was a non-alcoholic white wine, this time, and once again poured from the wineskin. The consensus seemed to be

¹⁵² Kenan B. Osborne, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World: A Theology for the Third Millennium* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 74.

that we disliked the white somewhat less than we had disliked the merlot. I was told that I didn't ever need to provide either of them again.

A benediction sent everyone off with the reminder that we were not leaving God behind in our tabernacle. Next week, we would journey to, and sojourn in, a Missional Church in Pomona, California.

Sojourn in the New City: A Glimpse of the Missional Church

“Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old.
Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.”¹⁵³

“There is no knowing or sensing a place except by being in that place,
and to be in that place is to be in a position to perceive it.”¹⁵⁴

On the next Sunday members drove by carpool to Urban Mission Church in Pomona, California—twenty-one miles away and approximately half an hour drive by freeway. Thirty-plus FCCW members joined a dozen Urban Mission congregants in the small, bare brick sanctuary, sitting in folding chairs in concentric arcs facing the *side wall*, with the (former) chancel to our right, hidden from view by drapes. In one corner of the sanctuary, on the polished concrete floor, were toys and crafts and several small children played there throughout the worship service. The center of our focus was a library desk converted into a communion table, draped in colorful cloths with a large, flat-screen monitor behind it where the greeting Welcome to Urban Mission was displayed.

Urban Mission regulars were very gracious in their welcome; this was a big day for them with this many visitors joining for worship. This new ministry had launched not a full year prior, and their Pastor Al Lopez had served as an Associate Minister at FCCW for over four years

¹⁵³ Isaiah 43:18–19 (RSV).

¹⁵⁴ Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, 321.

before leaving to start a new church that eventually became Urban Mission. It was an exciting mix of old home week and first day of school, familiar faces in new surroundings, new faces in an old building in a new formation, revered sacramental elements in a strange context. We had no organ, but we had YouTube. (The Order of Worship is presented in Appendix D.)

After worship, and before a meal was shared with community neighbors (neighbors are always invited and expected for meals at Urban Mission), we were given a brief tour of the campus. The former parsonage had become meeting rooms for various community groups and service agencies; the sanctuary became a meeting hall and workspace for Urban Mission's Prison Re-entry, Food Justice, and Prison Ministries. The yard and some parking had been torn out and converted into a community garden, and the entire campus was being transformed into a resource for the neighborhood, rather than merely the worshipping body. Urban Mission considered itself a *Parish Ministry*, rather than a congregational ministry.

While we were away

“But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. We are foreigners and strangers in your sight, as were all our ancestors. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope. LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you.”¹⁵⁵

“Believers must give up old loyalties in order to make space for the kingdom to come ... some of the most cherished church forms may be more of a hindrance than a help in regard to creating space for God. When such forms are removed, often what is left are simply tight-knit communities that hunger for the coming of God's reign.”¹⁵⁶

Months before our journeys commenced, preparations had begun for some space transformation that would occur while we were gone. A team of congregants and I identified

¹⁵⁵ 1 Chronicles 29:14–16 (RSV).

¹⁵⁶ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 91.

some physical work that could be done to make our sanctuary and other spaces in our buildings more welcoming and comfortable for guests.

The congregation had already approved the work of The Whole Place, and knew that some work was being undertaken in various abandoned classrooms in the education buildings to bring those spaces back to life and functionality. In the same vein, we gave ourselves some doable goals to make our main building entrance, narthex, and sanctuary a more welcoming experience for the first-time visitor and for those who might use our building for non-worship purposes. We had committed to the sharing of our building as *the* service ministry that we would provide for the community, and we therefore wanted to make some changes that would demonstrate to them and to us our commitment to doing what it takes to truly welcome others.

Cost was, of course, an issue. In order for the entire congregation to feel like we had made an investment and that we were all sacrificing something for the betterment of others, a rummage sale was planned. Our surplus treasures that were clogging closets, classroom, and cabinets at the church would be sold to provide funds for the New Thing that God would do through us.

An estate sale agent was retained (acknowledging that we did not have the energy on our own for such a task) and she held a two-day sale of our excess things. The fellowship hall was full of furniture, kitchenware, vintage Sunday school materials and equipment, 1930s theatrical lighting equipment, pews that had been removed from the sanctuary decades before, and a 1920s-era printing press that had printed labels for mailings back in the day when a thousand newsletters might be mailed at once. Our share of the proceeds (after paying the agent) was \$4,000.

A serendipitous side effect of the sale was that we were put in contact with a museum that was interested in buying pews. The director of Heritage Square Museum in Los Angeles attended our estate sale and noticed the old pews for sale, and the museum had a restored turn-of-the-century church building without pews. A deal was made for the previously removed pews at the sale *and* four rows of pews at the rear of the sanctuary. I loved the idea of telling anyone who missed the pews that they could visit them in a museum.

I had already prepared a wish list and Transformation Team members contributed their own ideas. Our goals were:

- bringing more natural light into the sanctuary,
- bringing in a new breath of life into our balcony via living plants,
- right-sizing our seating by removing four rows of pews from the rear,
- and creating a more welcoming feeling upon entering the sanctuary.

Eric Casey makes the point that not only are buildings and rooms full of memories, but “the particular configuration of a room may evoke resonant reveries on the part of the inhabitant of that room. These reveries, whether imaginative or memorial, are part of the building as well as the dwelling.”¹⁵⁷ It was hoped that a few small but significant changes to the configuration of the entrance to our sanctuary would create a more welcoming space.

Return from Pilgrimage: New Wine in a New Old Wineskin

“But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, 174.

¹⁵⁸ Ephesians 4: 2–24 (RSV).

“Homecoming presents an especially striking instance of the difference that place makes in a journey.”¹⁵⁹ “If in homecoming I come back to a home that *was*, in homesteading I come to a home *to be*.”¹⁶⁰

A month after we had walked out the doors following our Founder’s Day celebration, we came back home across the threshold of a place that we knew very well and yet had never experienced before.

My hopes (and perhaps my anxieties) were high, wondering just what would be the congregants’ reactions and emotions upon re-entering the same-and-yet-different place. My fervent prayer was that even the most firmly-rooted amongst us would somehow feel inspired in a way that would give us a lift and help us step forward in a new direction. It was hoped that whether or not they had gone with us on the journey, everyone should have had some different feeling walking into the refurbished sanctuary, and especially those who had taken the journey would have a different feeling than when they had left a month before. Casey says that the new we have experienced out there opens us to even more new ahead: “When we are brought back into a place at the end of our journey, we also find ourselves imagining other possibilities than our body may have experienced before. We come to live in this old/new place in altered corporeal comportments.”¹⁶¹

Casey maintains, “even in coming back to the exact place we left (homecoming) we will experience it as if it is a new place. Our experiences on a journey away will cause us to see home differently than we did when we left. As we say, ‘You can never go home again’; you have changed since you left and therefore you will never experience home in the same way you did

¹⁵⁹ Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, 274.

¹⁶⁰ Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, 299.

¹⁶¹ Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, 297.

before.”¹⁶² He says, “What matters is not the journey as such, much less its value as an incursion into the heroic or the exotic, the natural or the supernatural. What matters is the ability to present a contrast between the virtues of lastingness and the values of transience, between remaining in place and moving among places, and to do both in ways that realize an intricate dialectic of space and time.”¹⁶³

Before worship, a few people walked the new labyrinth. Now, rather than the instantaneous daunting decision of where to sit, visitors were greeted by the wall-to-wall labyrinth with informal conversation-area seating in its midst. Like medieval pilgrims returning home to labyrinths in the local cathedral, we would be able to continue our spiritual pilgrimage here, and those who had not gone out into the world with us could take their own pilgrimage via walking the labyrinth at their leisure.

On entering, one could see that the changes allowed for more light to flow in. The artist who had created our new painting was on hand for the unveiling, and stood by and answered many questions about it.

After a welcome and announcements, the service began with the appropriately titled hymn “This is the Day of New Beginnings.”¹⁶⁴ (The Order of Worship is presented in Appendix E.) A responsive Call to Worship was taken from the Disciples Chalice Worship and adapted to emphasize the dedication of the entire three-building campus and the congregants themselves to service of the other in ways that might go beyond the confines of traditional church programming. We asked God to “Help us to expand our perception of the many ways you make all of life sacred, and help us to join you as we join our neighbors in loving service and as hosts

¹⁶² Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, 294.

¹⁶³ Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, 283.

¹⁶⁴ Brian Wren, words and Carlton R. Young, music, “This is the Day of New Beginnings,” *Chalice Hymnal*, Hymn 518.

of this house ... Challenge us to continually widen our invitation and welcome in your Son's name ... Surprise us with the ways that we can be of service to you!"¹⁶⁵

After the choir sang an anthem, joys and concerns were shared (including the horror of the recent terrorist attacks in Paris) and a Pastoral Prayer was lifted up. "Create in Me" was sung as a hymn of prayer, asking that God might "Create in me a new heart, so that I'll give you more than part of this, the life you've given me, create in me a new heart, then I will teach, and others will know, and I will learn, my faith will grow. With you I can create new dreams, with you I can change lesser schemes, O God, new joy and a new start! Create in me a new heart."¹⁶⁶

I preached the sermon, *A Living Temple*, based on 1 Corinthians 3:9–17. This sermon was greatly modified in order to speak to the Paris terrorist attacks of November 13, 2015, just days before. Originally the sermon was to be a reminder that we, the body of Christ, were supposed to be the most visible, efficacious, and enduring Temple that our neighbors would ever experience in their lives, and that as Church buildings rise and fall, whether due to neglect or active demolition, it is the church membership and their interactions that *should* have made a lasting impact on the community. Instead, the sermon asserted that the individual lives and values that terrorists sought to extinguish would *not* be lost to God or in God, and that God would redouble efforts to bring about love and peace in the face of such acts of hatred and evil.

Singing "Here I Am, Lord," we promised God "I will go Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart."¹⁶⁷ Similarly "We Are Not Our Own" made the mutual commitment, "Let us be a house of welcome, living stone upholding living stone, gladly showing all our

¹⁶⁵ *Chalice Worship*, 229.

¹⁶⁶ Gayle Schoepf, words and music, "Create in Me," *Chalice Hymnal*, Hymn 519.

¹⁶⁷ Daniel L. Schutte, words and music, James Snyder, harmony, "Here I Am, Lord," *Chalice Hymnal*, Hymn 452.

neighbors we are not our own!”¹⁶⁸ In the Responsive Dedication of Our Lives we promised “both in laying hold and letting go we celebrate God’s goodness. We affirm the Spirit’s presence in the journey and in being home. We commit ourselves to the service of all on this journey.”¹⁶⁹ At the conclusion of the service, just prior to the Benediction, the congregation joined in a responsive reading of an Act of Rededication including “With heartfelt gratitude we now re-consecrate this chancel, this sanctuary, this building, this campus, and ourselves to the glory of God ... for the gathering and fostering of community, for the up-building of all who believe, for the nurture of those who do not yet believe but are seeking, and for the perfecting of the saints...”¹⁷⁰

Following the service, congregants and guests again met in the fellowship hall for a luncheon where they were introduced to many of our new Whole Place partners, hearing a description of their programs. This included an introduction to Pastor Danny Cortez and his New Heart Community Church congregants, who had begun a new chapter themselves, making their new worship home in a room adjacent to our fellowship hall on our first Sunday away. They joined us for the meal and told us a little about their own history, including how excited they were to get to know us all.

Musicians from The Academy of Music for the Blind entertained us, 4-H students gave presentations of various projects that they had entered into competitions, and tours were offered to show rooms that had recently been repurposed in order to be used by various Whole Place partners. Although the Free Store was not quite ready for its planned Gala Opening, congregants were invited to visit and to watch the introductory video. A Pranic Healer was ready to show the converted classroom where he and other energy healers would meet with clients. Academy of

¹⁶⁸ Brian Wren, words and music, Fred Graham, arrangement, “We Are Not Our Own,” *Chalice Hymnal*, Hymn 689.

¹⁶⁹ Prayer 105, *Chalice Worship*, 257.

¹⁷⁰ *Chalice Worship*, 230.

Music for the Blind instructors were available to talk about the many ways dozens of rooms were used for individual and group music and performance tutoring every Saturday. Artist Kenneth Armand Johnson stood in the sanctuary next to his new piece, *Faith*, to answer questions.

All were invited back later in the day for an evening meal and a screening of a film depicting the formation of Alcoholics Anonymous and a discussion hosted by members of various twelve-step groups who were part of our Whole Place community.

And so, at the conclusion of that day, after the film screening and discussion, our Pilgrimage experience was done. We had gone out into the world as pilgrims, wanderers, and sojourners on a journey, and while we were gone our worship home had undergone some changes designed to be more welcoming and more conducive to the New Things God might have in store. Hopefully the inner changes that had occurred *out there* would remain and foster even more change as we settled back into our new/old place.

Chapter Four

The View From the Other Side: Reflections on the Journey

“Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD!”¹⁷¹

“The end of any journey is also the beginning—
the end of the journey is the end of a new beginning
and the beginning of a new “now”—
we will always look back on the journey as the beginning of our new relationship
with the place we have come back to—and to the new places we will go.”¹⁷²

A Pastor’s reflection:

The entire process certainly gave the congregation a spiritual lift.

Like many contemporary congregations, at FCCW we were stuck in a space marked by nostalgia for the past, having a hard time moving ahead without dragging along the baggage of the past. A small band of leaders struggled to maintain a corporate-sized church with family-sized resources. They felt a sense of failure and guilt that they could no longer do the same volume of work and produce the same numerical results that preceding generations were able to accomplish. When asked who they *are* they often responded with who they *used to be*, and much of that story revolved around the buildings.

There is a power within the story we tell about ourselves, and if we were to escape the bounded-ness of the way we’d always done things, we first had to be able to tell a different story about who we are. Some of us needed help in changing the story we tell.

Through this process, at FCCW we have been reminded that the story of who we *are* is a bigger story than our full campus in the 50s and 60s. God’s people have always been called up and out of the comfort and security of the places we have taken root. The gospel calls us ever

¹⁷¹ Lamentations 3:40 (RSV).

¹⁷² Casey, *Getting Back Into Place*, 293.

forward. No matter how big we once were, no matter how prosperous, how influential, how impressive, we have not yet arrived.

Turner and Turner offer this promise: transitional rituals can facilitate changes within a congregational culture. Moving through the three phases of *separation, margin or limen*, and *reaggregation* assisted us in opening ourselves to that new thing God calls us toward. The first phase detached us from our old rooted places, the middle phase allowed us the freedom to hear God with fresh ears, and the last phase planted us inwardly transformed and outwardly changed in a new place, even if that new place has the exact same address that we left from. If we were serious about our desire for change, we needed to literally and figuratively walk away from our old selves in their old settings.

Virtually our entire bible is a travel narrative, and to possess biblical faith means to pick up and go time and time again. The ritualized spiritual practices of Pilgrimage, Wandering, and Sojourn moved our congregation physically in such a way as to foster internal, spiritual movement and provided a means of releasing at least some of the hold our buildings placed on us. Once we crossed the threshold we left behind the old rules and became freed even from the limitations of our old relationships with one another as we were forced to deal with each other and the world in totally new contexts.

Pilgrimage refers to a journey away from home, to a specific place, in order to inspire or revitalize oneself by recreating an experience of the Divine or a sacred event. Our pilgrimage to a 1915 building was an attempt to remind ourselves of how little our founders needed in the way of church *building* to be *church*. The setting also linked us to that part of our story that predated the glory years of the 50s. This pilgrimage wasn't dependent so much on the exact replication of the original site as it was on the intention to remember what had happened there.

Wandering evokes a spiritual journey away from home without a clear sense of direction, intentionally adrift and trusting that God will find and/or guide you. Our wandering in the park was a reminder that we need to occasionally have wilderness experiences where we don't have everything laid out just the way we like it, and we meet God in God's own sanctuary.

Sojourn demands that while on a journey to another ultimate destination, one pauses or assumes temporary residence among a foreign people/culture—trusting that God will somehow teach something about God's self or oneself in the experience. Our sojourn with the Urban Mission community challenged us to re-examine our relationship with our buildings, as their entire campus was being transformed into a resource for the neighborhood, rather than merely the Sunday morning worshipping body. Since we had committed to the sharing of our building as *the* service ministry that we would provide for our neighboring community, we were challenged to continue making changes that would demonstrate this commitment to doing what it takes to truly welcome others. We were challenged to remember more than who we had been; we were asked to remember who we are meant to be.

As Turner and Turner promised, once that first step was taken, by the mere act of crossing the threshold, our pilgrimage journey began to work a change within us, the pilgrims. It is that important first step which served to sever the ties of the dreaded *way we've always done things*. All three of these acts of journeying required that we leave home. Only by crossing the threshold could we begin to become changed by the liminal experience that can never happen back home. During these journey experiences there was an energy and anticipation that was not part of our usual worship services, because, well ... they were unusual. Each next step along the journey was in some way worried over, anticipated, puzzled over, and/or completely unexpected. Nothing *out there* could be taken for granted; nothing could be done the way we'd always done

it. Complacency, somnambulism, rote expressions, and predictability had all been left behind. Even the most normal and comfortable moments of our trip were still somehow edge-of-our-seat experiences.

For all of us, there were some moments when it seemed that we would surely veer over the embankment and crash because there were no lanes painted on our path and no guardrails. Everyone probably thought of themselves as puzzled navigators trying to make sense of the limited map they had been given.

The simplest and most well known elements of worship simply *had* to be seen in a new light, including the congregation itself. Nobody had a regular seat; we were often seated in such a way that we couldn't help but look right in somebody else's face/eyes; even people who always sat in the back were no more than two rows away from the front row or chancel, such as it was.

The worship service with Urban Mission was an especially lovely respite for me. Although never able to fully relinquish a sense of hosting even at someone else's church, I was able to be with my congregants in worship for an hour or so and not be in charge. Although I was always an apt observer, often anxiously/expectantly scanning faces to see how different worship elements landed on different individuals (paying very close attention to body language, facial expressions, energy given back to the worshipping body) it was different than if it had been *my* service to lead.

At Urban Mission, things weren't just different. We were experiencing some other-ness that was more than a different locale. We had journeyed to another culture with different norms and different expectations of what authentic worship looked like. Yes, at various times we had each had similar experiences as individuals, but never as the collective body of FCCW. Even though we were in the majority of those gathered in Urban Mission's sanctuary, we were

outsiders! *Our* way was not *the* way, and we were sharing that experience together. Here we looked at one another *as* the preacher asked questions and expected answers; we made eye contact with each other as we actually rearranged our seats in the middle of worship to engage in small group talk; we were surprised while our hosts were unfazed that the worship service began with a Rock Concert video.

Our return to FCCW on Re-dedication Sunday was also a joy. As I mentioned earlier, I was certainly pleasantly surprised at the unanimous enjoyment that was expressed verbally and non-verbally. The congregational leadership held a positive impression of our pilgrimage and believed that it had made a difference in the spiritual life of the congregation.

A sampling of responses from congregation leadership showed that, by and large, the congregation shared my feeling that the journeying had been worthwhile, and that we had also somehow moved *internally* along the way.

Although skeptical at first about the travels to various other places to conduct worship, it was evident during these varied services that we could function spiritually as a congregation, wherever we decided to meet. (See Appendix G1)

I understood on Founder's Day that the congregation was dedicating itself to embracing this new direction, looking forward instead of backward. This was a more profound exercise than it seemed on the surface. (See Appendix G2)

I liked the sense of deliberate displacement, an unfamiliar new envelope stripped of our FCCW accretions and shadow-burns of habit, expectation, rote assumptions, our default of spiritual/contextual "auto-piloting." I was forced to ask, "Can I care about these good folks outside—beyond our envelope of familiar default, of moribund habit?" (See Appendix G3)

I think there *was* a shift after the pilgrimage. (Even if only a small one.) We were reminded that we are a community of believers who can have church anywhere, and that we could exist outside of our big box of a building. (See Appendix G4)

I'm loving this next extension in the use of the building by The Whole Place since the pilgrimage; since then the congregation is more aware of them and all the people using the building, especially the children's programs. And they are very appreciative of that use. You know, there are people who are able to make use of the building for good community purposes, and I think the congregation is very comfortable and even pleased with that. (See Appendix G5)

There *was* a change, however slight and however impermanent. We had somehow moved off of a mark or escaped those deep ruts once, and that seems to have made it easier to jump back out of those ruts again from time to time.

As this work progresses, the next step is to help the congregation more fully become hosts for the increasingly diverse community that has developed in The Whole Place. Most congregants are pleased to hear reports of the various activities and programs taking place on the campus. We also have to find time and energy to establish a long term and ongoing relationship with our new housemates. Our Whole Place community is becoming a very active community center with many new and invigorating activities that FCCW can benefit from even more through full and enthusiastic participation.

In her book, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, Christine D. Pohl notes that

Abstract theological reflections on hospitality and welcoming the "other" are presently popular in some academic and pastoral circles. It is crucial that these discussions include making a physical space in our lives, families, churches, and communities for people who might appear to have little to offer. Hospitable *attitudes*, even a principled commitment to hospitality, *does not challenge us or transform our loyalties in the way that actual hospitality to particular strangers*

does. Hospitality in the abstract lacks the mundane, troublesome, yet rich dimensions of a profound human practice. Practicing hospitality always involves risk and the possibility of failure, but there is greater risk and loss in neglecting hospitality.¹⁷³

Hospitality is more than an intention and more than a feeling. Hospitality demands the investment of some effort and some time.

Packing Our Parachute: A Tangible Change

“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect;
but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”¹⁷⁴

In our Post-Pilgrimage years, the congregation has moved more quickly and easily into discussions regarding our future and the likelihood or not of remaining with the campus. In the early months following our journey, while the congregation was still not clear as to the next step regarding what good stewardship of the campus looked like, we were in *nearly* unanimous agreement that we needed to start developing a *plan* that could be implemented if and when it became clear that a release of the property was needed or desired. We began a series of bi-monthly Packing Our Parachute conversations about the many possible uses for the campus and of the many possible next steps for the congregation beyond the campus. We were packing our parachute, not because it was time to jump out of the plane, but because we didn’t want to worry about it the entire remainder of our flight. Once the parachute was packed, we’d know that it was ready and we could concentrate on other things without that added worry. (Some congregants rather moribundly refer to this process as preparing our Living Trust.)

As part of our ongoing discernment process, the congregation approved the work of the Adaptive Reuse Taskforce (intentionally comprised of non-members, as we don’t have the

¹⁷³ Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 14. Emphasis mine.

¹⁷⁴ Philippians 3:12–14 (RSV).

time/energy to spare for the extra work), who were charged with the task of fact-finding and assessing the feasibility of giving the buildings to a (as yet to be created) nonprofit foundation for the purposes of creating a Community Performing Arts Center. The congregation would have been very happy with such a project (provided the sanctuary, including our beloved organ, remained intact as a performance space), if all of the obstacles for such a project could be cleared. Ultimately this Task Force reported that while many in our city agreed that our campus would make a wonderful Performing Arts Center, identifying the major donors necessary to champion such an undertaking would take much longer than we could realistically wait.

Most recently (a full three years since our Pilgrimage), acknowledging that it is now time to pass along our buildings to a more energetic and forward-focused mission, our Administrative Board and Board of Elders brought to the congregation two recommendations, asking for approval of one of the two:

1. Place the campus on the market for sale, likely to another congregation.
2. Gift the campus (including our dear landmark sanctuary building) to Christian Church Homes, a ministry arm of our Disciples of Christ denomination, for the purpose of redevelopment as low-income senior housing.

Surprisingly (to me) the redevelopment option was approved. We are referring to this decision as a *continuation* of our ministry and not as an end to it. In keeping with Jesus' teaching that "as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me,"¹⁷⁵ we believe reinvesting our campus in this way will result in seventy-plus places for Jesus to lay his head.

The congregation voted to establish a firm culmination date (December 31, 2019) when we will, in one way or another, cross the threshold again and permanently leave the campus

¹⁷⁵ Matthew 25:40 (RSV).

behind as our church home. This is very much like Abraham's decision to *go*, trusting that more will be revealed on the other side of that decision.

While there are many mixed feelings about these decisions for everyone involved, myself included, I must say that I am pleased that the congregation approved this action as part of their ongoing legacy of Christian witness and service to the community. In the face of a rising homelessness crisis and escalating housing costs here in Southern California, this is a timely opportunity to care for our Lord by caring for our needy neighbor. I have to believe that our pilgrimage journey and the re-dedication we made of ourselves upon our return played at least a small part in our being able to make such a self-sacrificial gift. I believe that we were afforded an opportunity *out there* to see something in ourselves that we were unable to recognize back home. God was able to speak to us in fresh ways, and we have continued to listen with fresher ears because of it.

We still have some big conversations and decisions ahead of us in the coming year as to whether we continue as an autonomous body or join with another congregation; I believe that our pilgrimage experience will bear fruit in these discernments as well.

What would I do differently if I had the chance?

If another congregation chose to go on such a journey with the intent to come back and dramatically change the way that they interacted with the larger community, it would probably be a good idea to widely share the story and the return/rededication experience with that community; and that takes a lot of lead time and considerable coordination and legwork.

If a more energetic, more mobile congregation were to duplicate this process in any way, I would recommend that they try to journey as far, as long, and as exotically as possible. While there will always be a trade-off between higher participation and the distance/difficulty of the

journey, I believe that the chances are good that the more strenuous and exotic trip would be more impactful in the short and the long run. The symbolic benefit of a forty-day journey would be immense. Perhaps one week at a pilgrimage shrine of some sort, another three weeks wandering in various wilderness settings, and then a concluding one-week sojourn with another congregation before returning home would be a good goal.

Would I Recommend Pilgrimage, Wandering, and Sojourning?

Emphatically yes. For another mature congregation struggling to free themselves from the deep ruts of the way we've always done things, I strongly recommend that they *Take a Hike!* To another pastor looking for a biblically based spiritual practice that will assist his/her congregants in leaving behind the temptations of recreating their past, I say get them across the threshold. To all of us struggling to maintain forms of ministry and community that no longer seem to fit God's new day, I encourage taking a walk on the wild side, beyond the bounds of our buildings.

On the other side of our doorposts, betwixt and between, there are wonderfully liminal spaces where we may shed who we've always been and the ways we've always encountered God in favor of fresh expressions of self, community, and of the Divine. God is waiting for us out there and in the *New Thing* that beckons on the other side. Even when we come back, we come back different than when we left.

Appendices

Appendix A—Retreat

(New Beginnings Conclusions)

1. We were not interested/open to making any major changes to our worship service in order to be more appealing to a younger/different demographic. Although studies suggested that a more modern praise music format might be appealing to the growing numbers of Hispanic young families in the Whittier area, we like the hymnal, the choir and pipe organ. A congregational survey had in fact shown that when asked “What do you most value about worship at FCCW?,” congregants overwhelmingly valued the pipe organ more than bible-study and preaching!

2. While we admitted that we were too tired, too few, and too busy with life outside church to mount a new outreach ministry, congregants were bothered by the fact that it seemed the church had become solely self-focused. An undeniable finding of the study and resulting discussion was that because of the way we were currently doing church, if we were to pack up and disappear tomorrow there would be very little impact on our community. If, for example, we were to sell the campus to another congregation with no ties to the community and if that new congregation were to continue to play carillon bells on the hour and half hour, no one would really miss us or even know that we had left.

3. We were not ready to leave (we loved our pipe organ and beautiful sanctuary, and we thought we still had what it might take to serve others in some way), but we admitted that we needed to find some way to serve our neighbors in a meaningful way. Sitting and waiting for others to join us in worship was not enough. Good stewardship demanded that something happen on our campus that was not for our benefit or for our tenants (whose rental income would be for *our*

benefit). In order for us to rightly consider something a ministry/mission of the church, it had to *cost* us something, not generate income.

4. Out of this discernment process had developed the seminal concept for The Whole Place, a commitment to sharing with our neighbors the one resource we still had plenty of: *space*. We were no longer young, no longer numerous, no longer strong, no longer deep-pocketed—but we were space-rich. If we were to dramatically open our campus to non-church members for non-church programs with no expectation of benefit for ourselves, if we were to permit this new community to be self-governing and self-scheduling, if we could participate in this new venture as *partners* and not directors or gatekeepers, we could rightly consider the sharing of our assets of rooms as *ministry*.

Appendix B—Order of Worship for Founder’s Day

(Worship Materials)

1. Opening Hymn: “Rise Up O Saints of God”¹⁷⁶

2. Call to Worship

L/ God, whom we gather to worship, is aware of the gifts of sacrifice and love that went into the building of this place of worship; and into the formation and nurture of the generations upon generations of church family that have gathered here. God shares with us a gratitude for the hosts of persons who have ushered worshipers to their places,

P/ who have sung the gospel and lifted prayers in harmony,

L/ who have served as prophets and teachers from the pulpits,

P/ and who have presided over baptisms and have served the sacred meal.

L/ God joins us in saying, ‘Well done good and faithful servant’

to those who have shown little children what it means to be loved by Jesus, and what it means to serve him as a disciple.

P/ We gratefully give thanks for all those who have done the thankless tasks of cleaning up and repairing the facilities after we have used them,

L/ those who have served in the governance of this institution,

P/ and those who have been cheerful ambassadors in the wider community beyond these walls.

L/ The Lord affirms that other persons have labored before us, and that we have now entered into their labors in our own time.

P/ Lord God, we thank you for our heritage of faith, and all those who have worked tirelessly to pass it down to us:

L/ For the vision of the apostles and the evangelists who brought it to us, gracious Lord,

P/ we give you thanks and praise.

L/ For the courage of martyrs and teachers who secured it for us, gracious Lord,

P/ we give you thanks and praise.

L/ For the devotion of preachers and Pastors who proclaimed it to us, gracious Lord,

P/ we give you thanks and praise.

L/ For the love of families and friends who nourished it within us, gracious Lord,

P/ we give you thanks and praise.

L/ For the freedom to speak of it in the world about us, and to share it with our neighbors, gracious Lord,

A/ we give you thanks and praise.

Lord, we thank you for our heritage of faith. Give us the will and the strength to pass it on to others for the glory of your name and of Jesus Christ your Son.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ William P. Merrill, words and William H. Walter, music, “Rise Up O Saints of God,” *Chalice Hymnal*, Hymn 611.

¹⁷⁷ *Chalice Worship*, 192– 193.

3. Opening Prayer

“We pray to you our good and gracious God, as a people who cherish the memories that are ours, and who claim a common history as a sacred gift. We ask you to renew your grace in us; that we might recognize your presence in our midst and hear the call of the gospel in the human needs that surround us. Through the power of your compelling Spirit may we grow in courage and walk boldly in faith that our actions might reflect the love we profess.”¹⁷⁸ We ask this in the name of your child, Jesus our Christ, and we share now the prayer he gave us, saying: (Lord’s Prayer).

4. Hymn of Prayer: “Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart”¹⁷⁹

5. Scripture: Hebrews 11:1–40

6. Sermon: “To Live in the Land of Promise”

The letter to the Hebrews was written to an early Christian Community, urging them to persevere in faith and hope the face of hardship. This early band of believers had suffered persecution, and their ranks had diminished, as some of their brothers and sisters in the faith had given up their faith. The going had gotten tough, and some people had chosen to walk away from the difficult life of discipleship that Jesus has promised to everyone who truly walks in His footsteps.

In Chapter 11 of this letter, the author lifts up the long list of Heroes of the faith from the Hebrew Bible and urges his readers to have similar faith. *Not* because of what was wonderful about their present condition, but because of the promise that had been made to them by Christ. Just as in those days of old, God was not done working in the world, and God would find a way to work through them despite their current difficult circumstances.

God had not finished His great story when Enoch was taken up into heaven; God’s story had not finished with Noah’s Ark, and had not finished with Abraham’s great journey. The story of God’s working with and through humanity did not conclude with Isaac and Jacob, nor was

¹⁷⁸ *Chalice Worship*, 193.

¹⁷⁹ George Croly, words and Frederick C. Atkinson, music, “Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart,” *Chalice Hymnal*, Hymn 265.

Sarah the last person to be faithful in service to God. God used Moses to move an entire nation, but even Moses did not live to see the end of the story. Warriors and kings and prostitutes and slave girls, prophets and priests and hermits and martyrs—all remembered for great acts of faith—but *not* because they were the ones to see the *conclusion* to the story of God’s interaction with humanity...*none of them*, mighty or lowly...had seen the culmination of the promises that God had made to His people...as we heard read earlier—God had waited to provide “Something *better* for us that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”¹⁸⁰

Well now, we all know what the something better was that God had provided, don’t we?—Jesus Christ had come at long last to fulfill the promises that had been made over the centuries... Jesus came and finally perfectly revealed God’s true nature, Jesus revealed God’s true desires for a relationship with creation, Jesus revealed God’s true plans for salvation, he revealed the boundless depth of God’s love. After all of the centuries, after all of the chapters of this great story, after all of the faithful lives that had been played out in the telling of this story, *finally* the promise had been fulfilled that none of that long list of the faithful had lived to see.

(That’s great pastor, but just what does that have to do with US, today? What does that have to do with *Founder’s Day*?)

Remember how this chapter of scripture ends: “all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.”¹⁸¹

The author is asking US to count ourselves in the same league as all of those Heavy Hitter Hebrew Bible faithful. Jesus didn’t just come to fulfill the promises made to a bunch of ancient Middle Easterners—Jesus came to fulfill promises made to the entire world—in every

¹⁸⁰ Hebrews 11:40 (RSV).

¹⁸¹ Hebrews 11:39–40 (RSV).

age and every place. Without Jesus, Noah wasn't perfect. Without Jesus, Abraham was not perfect—the story wasn't finished yet. No matter how faithfully he served God—Abraham needed Jesus to finish his story portion of the story. Even Moses needed Jesus to wrap up the work that he'd done so faithfully for God.

And the letter to the Hebrews says that the same is true for us. It's not how much we do or do not get accomplished that matters in the end—it's not whether or not we do monumental works on God's behalf—what matters is that *we remain faithful* and allow God through Christ to finish our story for us. We may erect great monuments or leave nothing behind but memories—we may fight great battles or remain hidden in the shadows—it doesn't matter how *our lives* end—that's not where the *story* ends, and Jesus alone will write the final sentence of our story and *the* story.

Today we celebrate the faith-filled work of our own “Great cloud of witnesses.”¹⁸² We don't need to go as far back as the ancient Hebrew Bible. We have 120 years of our *own* stories of faithful service in the face of great odds. We gratefully remember the twenty-three charter members meeting in an unfinished portion of the Bailey School, who thought there should be a Christian Church here in Whittier. We remember the growing band that met in the Lindley Block Building across the street, and then built a church at the corner of Hadley and Pickering—adding to that building three times in eighteen years. We remember faithful brothers and sisters who mortgaged their own homes to secure funding to build this beautiful sanctuary—and then those who sold chicken dinners to meet that note during the depression. They built a modern temple to house 1,000 worshipers with enough classrooms for 700 students. And they served all who came.

¹⁸² Hebrews 12:1 (RSV).

We remember the faithful brave who no sooner paid off the debt for this building than they took out another loan to build the youth building with five more classrooms and two large halls, and then a decade later took another leap of faith and built yet another building with another seven classrooms.

But just like Noah and Moses and Abraham and the rest of our list of ancient heroes of the faith, none of OUR heroes lived to see the *fulfillment* of the promise either. Not even in the mid-60s, with every one of those classrooms full and with the choir loft behind me full and with more programs and committees than you could shake a stick at—not even in those halcyon days did ANYONE here see the *fulfillment* of the dreams they had faithfully built for, because the story wasn't done yet. God was not done yet. The work of Christ's church was not done yet. Even the most faithfully dedicated and industrious servant in those busy, busy days of this church's history—even THEY needed Jesus to finish *their* story.

And we would do well to remember that JESUS' story did not conclude here in 1969. We are STILL *living into* the promised future that God continues to spread before us. Although the church in America and this church at Greenleaf and Hadley both saw their greatest NUMBERS peak in the 60s—that was not the Promised Land that our forefathers and mothers in the faith were seeking. *And we should not be trying to go back there, any more than the ancient faithful would have returned to from whence THEY came.*

“If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city...”¹⁸³

¹⁸³ Hebrews 11:15–16 (RSV).

Even those of us who lived through the church culture of the 50s and 60s, when it seemed that we were doing *everything* that God could want a church to do—even we have only *glimpsed* the Promised Land. We are *still* being called to *be* the body of Christ and to continue the faithful work of our ancestors in the faith and to continue working *toward* that Promised Land.

Notice that our author never says that Abraham *reached* the Promised Land—“By faith he went to live in the *land of promise*, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. (For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.)”—He went to live in the *land of promises*—not the Promised Land—Abraham continued to look forward to God’s City. We too, even we heirs of that Glorious Church of the 50s and 60s, need to faithfully live in *the land of promises* while we work as the Body of Christ to help bring about God’s desired *promised land*—the one we pledge ourselves to help build every week when we pray, “Thy Will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

Our future may or may not ever again include packed Sunday Morning Sanctuaries and overflowing Sunday School classes—but that shouldn’t really be our goal anyway—that was the work of a previous generation—we are no more to repeat that work than Moses was to build an ark. Overflowing classrooms was never a promise God made to the faithful. If we are to ever see those numbers increase again, it will be because we have done such a good job at doing *something else* along the way.

We continue to live in the land of promises. And we should never give up faith and hope that God will fulfill ALL of those promises. What we *might* want to give up faith in is the belief that the way God intends to fulfill the promises of Christ’s Church on Earth is through Study groups, programs, and committees. We may need to give up our faith in stained glass and pipe organs. We may need to give up our faith even in Bible Study! (Don’t anybody leave here saying

the pastor said we should sell the organ and give up Bible Study—both are very useful to some of us—*But* what you *can* leave here saying is that the Pastor said we should probably give up our *faith* in the Organ and Bible Study as the primary vehicles of fulfilling God’s promises to the world through Christ’s Church.)

There are lots of people saying that the church needs to give up our buildings—but what I would argue is that what we need to give up is our faith in these buildings—give up our stubborn faith that in and of themselves they will attract and hold people in relationship with Christ. It is our *attachments* to our buildings and our reliance on these buildings (and sometimes our outright worship of the buildings) that is our biggest problem today. God does not want full buildings—unless they are full of people loving and serving one another. It is not enough that we love and care for one another—these are BIG buildings—they should hold a lot of love for *a lot of people*. Jesus’ great commandment was to love God and our *neighbors* as ourselves—not love God, love ourselves, and make sure *they* attend Sunday School.

We live in the land of promises—some people outside of these walls have heard those promises and some have not. Rather than asking them to sit down with us and read about those promises, it is time for the church to take seriously the job of walking alongside and *being* the fulfillment of those promises. We are to be the embodiment of Christ, embracing our neighbors as openly and as fully and as unflinchingly as Jesus did himself. People are tired of being invited to sit and study about the loving shepherd, but they are still eager to meet him and to be loved by him.

We must no longer worry about membership rolls when we decide whom our buildings serve. We must no longer simply look for tenants or people to sit in the pews who will help us pay our bills—we must first and foremost strive to love our neighbors with the resources we

have been given. *If we cannot do this—then it will be time to surrender the buildings to someone who can.*

We were not asked to become the landlords of Christ...

On this Founder's Day we can certainly rejoice and give thanks for the faithful servants who labored to build these buildings in Christ's name, but we also owe their legacy more than trying to slavishly duplicate the work that they did in their generation—to do so would be to return to the homeland that God called us from in the first place. God is calling us to do a *New Thing*—and we can do it with or without these buildings. We simply cannot allow the memory of what used to happen in our buildings keep us from doing that new thing.

God still promises that we are to receive “something better” than any previous generation has seen—and we will not reach that something better by trying to recapture the good old days. Only by moving ahead—deeper into the land of promises, can we be the faithful servants that God will use to bless *this* generation through Christ's Church.

Therefore, for at least this season, we will act as Hosts of The Whole Place—doing everything that we can to authentically welcome and be of service to our neighbors as *they* determine the many ways that these buildings can be of use to them. God is already doing a new thing and it is our task to join Him there and to be a Christ-presence there.

7. Invitation Hymn: “I Love to Tell the Story”¹⁸⁴

8. Stewardship Meditation

“May these be the words of our hearts as we prepare to collect the offering this day:
In the light of your love shining through the life of Jesus, O God,
we offer ourselves to you.
In the light of the world's need for people who can truly love,

¹⁸⁴ Katherine Hankey, words and William G. Fischer, music, “I Love to Tell the Story,” *Chalice Hymnal*, Hymn 480.

we offer ourselves to you.
 In the light of our own failure in the past to live unselfishly,
 we offer ourselves to you.
 We put body, mind, and soul at the disposal of your love.
 Use us as you will to meet the needs of your family on earth.
 Mold our lives
 so that the love and power of Christ may work through us.
 Renew the life of this congregation
 so that Christ may be seen more clearly in our midst.”¹⁸⁵
 The Deacons will now accept our morning’s gifts, tithes, and offerings.

9. Communion Hymn: “The Church’s One Foundation”¹⁸⁶

10. Closing responsive prayer

L/ God of ages past, we thank you for those who have told ‘The Old, Old Story’ so well,
 P/ may we today be as faithful as they in service to you and our neighbors.
 L/ God of eternal truth, we thank you for your never-changing words of justice, mercy,
 compassion, and healing;
 P/ Speak to us through the spoken and unspoken needs of our present world.
 L/ God of unlimited imagination and creativity, we pledge ourselves as co-creators with you of
 the new day and the new age that you seek to bring into being;
 P/ encourage us to break beyond the bounds of tradition and habit, and use us to spread your
 Good News to wider and wider circles of people.
 L/ God of ever-fresh Spirit; motivate us to turn this page in our history and to step eagerly into
 the next chapter;
 P/ free us from slavish devotion to past models and forms, inspire us with fresh visions and call
 us to new vistas.
 L/ Help us to resist the temptation to look back over our shoulder as if our way is there;
 P/ burn as a pillar of fire before us; leading us beyond limited horizons to lands you alone can
 see.
 L/ God who goes before us and extends us fresh promises with each new day; take us on a
 pilgrimage from this place and out into the wider world,
 P/ that we might meet you there and join you in the work of thy will being done on earth as it is
 in heaven. Amen.

11. Closing Sung Response, “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah,” vs. 3.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ *Chalice Worship*, Prayer 482, page 382.

¹⁸⁶ Samuel J. Stone, words and Samuel S. Wesley, music, “The Church’s One Foundation,” *Chalice Hymnal*, Hymn 272.

¹⁸⁷ William Williams, words and John Hughes, music, “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah,” *Chalice Hymnal*, Hymn 622.

Appendix C—Genesis Schoolhouse Pilgrimage Worship Elements

1. Prayer

God we come to you this day with a mixture of concern and hope. We express our concern that we may not know how to conduct worship without all of the various elements that we have come to count on. We admit to missing the comfort of the familiar, and to the fear of the unknown. We are also hopeful, for we know that you are with us, and that if we meet you with love and devotion in our hearts you will be pleased with whatever happens here in this coming hour. Help us to recognize you in our midst, and to listen for your voice among our voices.

You have heard our hopes for this worship service.

Oh God, we hope:

Everyone can find us here.
We have everything we need.
God will show us something new.
We will still be church.
This will be worth coming.
We forget that building.
We remember how nice that building is.
We remember we still have each other.
This will be fun and new.
Something different will happen to us here. Amen.

Appendix D—Sojourn: A Glimpse of the Missional Church

After a Welcome from Pastor Al Lopez, we watched and listened to a new age Prelude; “Paradise” by Coldplay.¹⁸⁸ This would clearly not be worship as we were used to it.

An FCCW Elder led the congregation in a Call to Worship and a Gathering Prayer was offered by a member of Urban Mission. Sharing the Peace preceded the reading of the Word: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The Word was with God in the beginning. Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word nothing came into being. What came into being through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.”¹⁸⁹

We sang another song along with our big screen praise leaders: “All Creatures of Our God and King” by the David Crowder Band.¹⁹⁰

Pastor Al gave The Message: *Godwork* (The second in a series on Creation Care.)

The sermon format was also different for us; it was more of a conversation between Pastor Al and the worshipers.

As part of the Message Response, we watched a Green Chalice/Blessed Tomorrow Announcement Video prepared for the 2015 General Assembly of The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). This video highlighted a Disciple Green Chalice Congregation and its growing community garden project. Small group discussion followed, discussing the following questions in groups of two to three:

¹⁸⁸ Coldplay-Paradise (Official Video), YouTube, January 18, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1G4isv_Fylg.

¹⁸⁹ John 1:1–5 (CEB).

¹⁹⁰ All Creatures of Our God and King – David Crowder Band – YouTube, January 18, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSFK7UiH5Us>.

1. How can you be a better steward of creation?

2. How can you help your congregation do creation care Godwork?

Each small group was asked to share ideas for the ways our congregations could become better environmental stewards.

In preparation for Communion the video praise band again accompanied us as we sang “Taste and See” by Rob Leveridge.¹⁹¹

Prayer requests were shared as part of the Sharing of Gifts, followed by Announcements, and a parting Blessing.

¹⁹¹ Taste and See – Rob Leveridge – YouTube, January 18, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ZPsvQfVDxk>.

Appendix E—Rededication Sunday

1. Space Transformation Work

A shopping list was drawn up with our budget in mind, and materials were purchased. Volunteers under my supervision did most of the construction/remodeling work. There was demolition and reframing required in order to accommodate the large pieces of glass creating two large windows in the sanctuary walls. Glass doors into the History Room and Library were put in place and new carpeting was installed in a second-story hallway rarely seen by congregants, but increasingly used by Whole Place guests.

The narthex was de-cluttered and given a face-lift. Walls received touch-up paint, new frames for the bulletin boards, glass was installed in the large doors leading into the sanctuary, and three large signs above those three doors reading faith, hope, and love: faith and hope above the two side-doors, slightly larger LOVE above the center-door (echoing 1 Corinthians 13:13).

Outside above the three front doors, banners were hung. A rainbow banner and a *Pray for Peace* dove banner hung above the side doors, and a banner displaying the Disciples of Christ Red Chalice logo reading *All are Welcomed, All are Valued, All are Loved* was hung over the center door.

In the sanctuary, a labyrinth pattern was laid out with ink markers onto the carpet where the pews had been removed, café tables and chairs and armchairs with side-tables were purchased and arranged in the large open areas within the labyrinth. A large new piece of art titled “Faith,” created specifically for our sanctuary by artist Kenneth Armand Johnson, was hung, along with some other new pieces and an older work that was reframed to make another old treasure new. Scuffed walls were touched up with paint. A sound machine played forest birdsong that sounded like birds were singing somewhere up in the balcony.

In the balcony (largely unseen and unvisited by the congregation for decades), four large ficus trees were moved in and placed so that they were visible from the main level of the sanctuary, hanging plants were suspended from the balcony railing, and several pews were removed, allowing more light to come in through the stained glass windows and creating meditation/conversation areas in the highest corners of the balcony.

A member of the Transformation Team had wisely pointed out that it would be important to find ways to honor/highlight some items from the congregation’s past in a new way, to show that our goal was not to forget the past, but to use the resources from our past in creative new

ways. A treasured painting gifted by a former pastor's wife was removed from the library, reframed in a more modern and elegant frame, and given a prominent place in the new gathering area around the labyrinth. An antique regulator clock moved up from the basement fellowship hall and took its new spot in the narthex. Handmade banners that had been created by members of the congregation three decades ago were taken down, dry-cleaned, and re-hung high in the balcony where they would be seen in a new way by visitors and congregants who had seen them every Sunday for thirty years.

The desired effect was achieved; when the congregation returned they would find a brighter, airier, more open and welcoming building than they had left. And all that it cost them was some of their old, unused stuff and a little manual labor. (And hitting the road for a few weeks to allow the transformation to occur in their absence.)

2. Opening Hymn: "This is a Day of New Beginnings"¹⁹²

3. Call to worship

"L/ Wondrous God, the skies and the highest heavens cannot contain you, much less temples made by human hands. Yet you dwell on this earth among us and make yourself known in sacred space and time. *Help us to expand our perception of the many ways you make all of life sacred, and help us to join you as we join our neighbors in loving service and as hosts of this house.* Receive this house afresh for your glory as we rededicate it and ourselves to your service.

P/ Fill this sanctuary *and this entire city block* with your Holy Spirit. May these walls, these rooms, these furnishings, these holy emblems, *and our very lives* declare your praise.

L/Consecrate afresh *these* buildings to your service and us this *living* church to Christ's ministry *of self-sacrificial service*. May we show forth your loving-kindness as a light upon a stand that leads others to see our good works and give you praise.

P/ Accept the praise of our lips, the songs of our hearts, the adoration of our spirits, that in all things we may glorify you and enjoy you forever.

L/Attend to every prayer uttered aloud or in secret, touching each heart with the certainty that no prayer goes unanswered.

P/ Proclaim you word by the reading of the scriptures and the preaching of the gospel. *Make us living sermons that breathe life anew into the ever-fresh old, old story.*

L/ Reveal yourself to your people gathered around the Lord's Table in the breaking of bread and in communion with one another. *Challenge us to continually widen our invitation and welcome in your Son's name.*

¹⁹² Brian Wren, words and Carlton R. Young, music, "This is a Day of New Beginnings," *Chalice Hymnal*, Hymn 518.

P/ Greet with outstretched arms the children entrusted to your care, those who are baptized, and those who join this body as members. Bless those who pledge themselves to one another in holy marriage, adding strength to their vows.

L/ Comfort all who gather in mourning for the loss of a loved one; giving them courage to celebrate the gift of life and to know your eternal love.

P/ Reconcile by the power of your Spirit those who feel themselves estranged from you and one another. Within this body grant them your peace, putting an end to all hostility *and petty rancor*.

L/ Sanctify all that we are, all that we have, all that we shall become, and make us wholly yours. *Surprise us with the ways that we can be of service to you!*

P/ Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to you, our God, forever and ever! Amen.”¹⁹³

4. Prayer

God of all glory, whose habitation is the whole of creation, we rejoice that you make yourself known particularly in the midst of those who gather as your people in Christ’s name. May this place be a holy meeting ground between you and your people. Make yourself known afresh to us today as we dedicate anew this sanctuary, these buildings, and ourselves to your service. May this sanctuary and your universal church without walls ever resound to praise of your glorious name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who gave us this prayer: (*Lord’s Prayer*)

5. Hymn of Prayer: “Create in Me”¹⁹⁴

6. Hymn of Invitation: “Here I Am, Lord”¹⁹⁵

7. Communion Hymn: “We Are Not Our Own”¹⁹⁶

8. Responsive Dedication of Our Lives

“L: Life is a journey with others; we travel as a people, on a winding road. We share our lives, our experiences, our hopes, our fears.

P: With joy and hope we welcome other travelers to share our lives. We learn from each other. We laugh and cry with each other. We are home with each other.

L: Life is a series of hellos and good-byes. There are those who arrive to be with us. There are

¹⁹³ *Chalice Worship*, 229 (modifications in italics).

¹⁹⁴ Gayle Schoepf, words and music, “Create in Me,” *Chalice Hymnal*, Hymn 519.

¹⁹⁵ Daniel L. Schutte, words and music, James Snyder, harmony, “Here I Am, Lord,” *Chalice Hymnal*, Hymn 452.

¹⁹⁶ Brian Wren, words and music, Fred Graham, arrangement, “We Are Not Our Own,” *Chalice Hymnal*, Hymn 689.

those who move ahead of us beyond death.

A: Both in laying hold and letting go we celebrate God's goodness. We affirm the Spirit's presence in the journey and in being home. *We commit ourselves to the service of all on this journey.*"¹⁹⁷

9. Act of Rededication

"L/ We rejoice in having completed the renovation of our place of worship. With heartfelt gratitude we now re-consecrate this chancel, *this sanctuary, this building, this campus, and ourselves* to the glory of God.

P/ In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we do this.

L/ We re-dedicate this house to the glory of God, who has called us by sheer grace: to the glory of Jesus Christ, who loves us and gave himself for us; and to the glory of the Holy Spirit who illumines and sanctifies us.

P/ We re-dedicate this house for the worship of God in praise and prayer; for the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified, risen, exalted; and for the celebration of the holy sacraments of God's grace.

L/ We re-dedicate this house for the giving of comfort to all who mourn; of strength to all who are tempted, *of fellowship to all who are lonely,* of light to all who seek the way.

P/ We re-dedicate this house for the hallowing of family life, for the teaching and guiding of the young; *for the gathering and fostering of community,* for the up-building of all who believe, *for the nurture of those who do not yet believe but are seeking,* and for the perfecting of the saints;

L/ We re-dedicate this house for the increase of righteousness; for the spread of the spirit of love; and for the extension of the reign of God.

A/ And now, as a people within the household of God in the unity of faith;

in the communion of the saints;

in love and goodwill to all;

in gratitude for the gift of this house

to be a dwelling place of God through the Spirit;

we re-dedicate ourselves to the worship of God

and the service of God's mighty realm;

in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen."¹⁹⁸

10. Closing Sung Response: "Called As Partners in Christ's Service," verse 4¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Prayer 105, *Chalice Worship*, 257 (modifications in italics).

¹⁹⁸ *Chalice Worship*, 230 (modifications in italics).

¹⁹⁹ Jane Parker Huber, words and John Zundel, music, "Called As Partners in Christ's Service," *Chalice Hymnal*, Hymn 453.

Appendix F—Story of Val and Tino

Having decided to visit a new church one Sunday, Val had suggested they try FCCW; they had driven past it for years and never been inside. Tino was reluctant, “I didn’t think that FCCW was the place for me, a heavily tattooed ex-biker—I’m not the kind of people that are supposed to go to church there.” Val persisted, “Let’s just give it a try.” Tino relented reluctantly. Parking the car and getting out, Tino again said, “Look at this place, they’re not gonna be happy to see *me!*” And now Val wasn’t sure either, but said, “Let’s just go look inside.”

And as Tino continued their story he said, “Pastor, you don’t know what it’s like trying to decide to come up those big steps out there and come in through those big doors between the big columns—it’s like coming into a courthouse—and people like me don’t like courthouses! And then, once you get inside the doors, you have to decide if you’re going to open the *next* big wooden doors, and you can’t even see what’s happening inside.” (They’d arrived after worship had started and doors were closed to block Uptown street noise.) “And then when you step inside, before you really know what’s going on or if you even want to stay, a little old lady hands you a program and starts to *put* you in a pew! If she hadn’t been such a sweet little lady I might have jerked my arm away and ran back out the door!”

Appendix G—Congregational Feedback

1. (Gerhard: Elder, Choir member, Board Secretary)

Although skeptical at first about the travels to various other places to conduct worship, it was evident during these varied services that we could function spiritually as a congregation, wherever we decided to meet, whether it be at an old school building, which I loved, in a park, or at another church miles away from FCC.

Secondly, I loved the friendly interactions of congregation members with each other at the different places and the obviously different worship segments carried out. Despite the absence of the beloved organ at FCC, we were still able to praise God with wonderful music and song. And of course, the return to our sanctuary was in my opinion a new beginning of sorts. We were able to admire the positive changes to the plant and the new design. To me it was exhilarating.

2. (Megan: regular worship attendee, intentional “non-member,” Whole Place participant and leader)

I understood on Founder’s Day that the congregation was dedicating itself to embracing this new direction, looking forward instead of backward. This was a more profound exercise than it seemed on the surface. The profound part was the invitation for these experienced, lifelong Christians to provide their service for themselves instead of showing up to the God Store with the service readymade. A lot of them managed to show up for these special off-campus services and were good sports about trying something new. Individually many of them are adventurous.

I like that during the Return worship we rededicated ourselves and our entire campus to be of service to our neighbors. The creation of and support for The Whole Place hasn’t included much congregational participation to date, but the congregation and church board see The Whole Place as the church’s primary mission activity, and have provided moral and financial support as such. They have placed a great deal of trust in our ability to carry out the church mission and take care of the church campus.

3. (Richard- Property Chair, Elder, Architect, hand-painted faux finishes in Sanctuary thirty years ago and designed current exterior paint scheme)

I for one was seeking a release from the burdens and blessings of our persistent and oftentimes pervasive “historic-sight”—I make a deliberate pun here...our preoccupations with “historic-hindsight”.

(Schoolhouse) I liked the sense of deliberate displacement, an unfamiliar new envelope stripped of our FCCW accretions and shadow-burns of habit, expectation, rote assumptions, our default of spiritual/contextual “auto-piloting.” I was forced to ask, “Can I care about these good folks outside—beyond our envelope of familiar default, of moribund habit?

Yes, the plumbing, the water, roofs, heating and air conditioning, paint...the decay and brokenness of the *finite* and the *fixed* was uncomfortably exchanged for moments of the infinite, the grace and *provi-dance* of the changeable—Divine Flux!

(Park) gathering as wandering, curious, lost children under the skydome of God’s sanctuary; out-of-doors was refreshing and invigorating—it was cold, clear, *clumsy* in a good way! Simple—causing me to again imagine the idea I once had of a rooftop garden worship service.

(Urban Mission) We, the NEWCOMERS welcomed by the other! Tables flipped—this was really good for us, the gathering in a comfortably tight space; historic—but not in the burdensome way FCCW has become, in a working-class neighborhood. We were welcomed, fellowshipped, and fed too!

The shrunken footprint (of the church) could be manageable, and with less burden than operating a complicated superstructure and the expectations of habit, all to underwrite the possibility of a *Missional* regeneration with renewed purpose. They have cleared arteries of the lard and the choking cholesterol of history; freeing up capacity, though modest, for a little renaissance of renewal, congregational metamorphosis, renewed purpose and mission!

4. (Michyl, pastor’s wife, choir member, a loving insider/outsider perspective)

(School house) Meeting in the school felt very primitive. It illustrated how you don’t need to be in a building that’s called a church, to have actual church. The order of service was very different and free flowing, which is a 180 from our typical Sunday mornings.

(Park) This was my favorite day. We walked around the grounds of the park and found a part of nature that could be the offering. I watched as three people, including me, brought something to our wheelchair-bound congregant which really showed us all how thoughtful the congregation can be.

(Urban Mission) I remember everyone coming into this strange space that wasn't ours/theirs. This was actually different than the other two pilgrimages, as those two were just us, doing our thing in our different way. This week we were guests. The mere fact that there was a huge screen where an altar would be was a little jarring to many.

(Coming Home) People enjoyed the openness and inclusion that the windows in the doors to the history room and library and nursery and office brought. It ties the space together. The space transformation has been in my opinion the most valuable part of the pilgrimage. We came "home" to something new and changed. I think there was a shift after the pilgrimage. (Even if only a small one.) We were reminded that we are a community of believers who can have church anywhere, and that we could exist outside of our big box of a building.

5. (John: Retired Episcopal priest, FCCW Elder Moderator, Dean of the New Millennium School, a Whole Place Partner)

I think they (the congregation) have been very supportive of use of the building and have expressed that during the times that we have been together as a community since the pilgrimage. There is also...well, I'm loving this next extension in the use of the building by The Whole Place since the pilgrimage; since then the congregation is more aware of them and all the people using the building, especially the children's programs. And they are very appreciative of that use. You know, there are people who are able to make use of the building for good community purposes; and I think the congregation is very comfortable and even pleased with that.

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